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# Hunolt's Sermons.

Sermons by the Rev. Francis Hunolt, Priest of the Society of Jesus and Preacher in the Cathedral of Treves. Translated from the original German edition of Cologne, 1740, by the REV. J. ALLEN, D.D., Chaplain of the Dominican Convent of the Sacred Heart, King Williamstown, and of the Dominican Convent, East London, South Africa.

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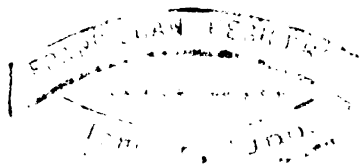
REV. FATHER FRANCIS HUNOLT,  
*Priest of the Society of Jesus, and Preacher in the Cathedral of Treves.*

Translated from the Original German Edition of Cologne, 1740,

BY THE

REV. J. ALLEN, D. D.,  
*Missionary Priest, Queenstown, South Africa.*

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† JAMES D. RICARDS,

*Bishop of Retimo and Vicar-Apostolic of the  
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# ON HELL.

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## THIRTY-NINTH SERMON.

### ON THE ETERNAL FIRE OF HELL.

#### Subject.

The reprobate shall be condemned: 1. To fire; 2. To eternal fire.—*Preached on Quinquagesima Sunday.*

#### Text.

*Tradetur enim gentibus.*—Luke xviii. 32.

“For he shall be delivered to the gentiles.”

#### Introduction.

Who was to be delivered to the gentiles? The Son of man, Jesus Christ. He was to be mocked, despised, spat upon, scourged, nailed to a cross, and put to death. And what wrong had He done? None whatever. He was innocence and holiness itself. Why then had He to suffer such treatment? To atone for the sins of the world, and to offer full satisfaction for them to His heavenly Father. O sinners! woe to you and me if we do not atone by timely repentance for our many crimes! For if an angry God delivered up His only Son into the hands of the gentiles to be put to death for the sins of others, how will it be with us if we fall into the hands of an avenging God on that day? If the sentence on us shall be, “Depart, you cursed;” words which we have made the subject of a recent meditation? Alas! thus abandoned and rejected by God, shall we too be delivered up? and to whom, and for what purpose? To the gentiles, to be mocked, and scourged, and crucified? Ah, even that would be tolerable! But far more terrible shall the sentence be. Hear it again: “Depart, you cursed!” Whither? “Into ever-

lasting fire!" Here is food for thought. Fire! Eternal fire! These words alone suffice to represent to the imagination that terrible final sentence. Loss of heaven! Separation from the sovereign Good! The gnawing worm of conscience! Mental anguish and desperation! Mad rage and fury against one's companions! Hideous goblins and devilish shapes of horror! Mad howlings and curses and blasphemies of the damned! Intolerable stench of so many bodies burning in a pit of sulphur! Hunger and thirst! Serpents and the gall of dragons! Torments without alleviation, comfort, or hope! These and similar horrors are ascribed to hell in the Holy Scriptures; but I need not refer to them now. I may afford to treat them as if they were mere fables. Fire! Eternal fire! This one thought is enough to make the hair stand on end. O fire! eternal fire! who can dwell in thee? My dear brethren, we think so seldom of this; and yet if we reflected on it as frequently as we should, eternal fire would not be the lot of so many. We shall consider this subject to-day, according to the warning of the Holy Ghost: "Let them go down alive into hell;"<sup>1</sup> go down in thought into hell during life, that you may not have to go there after death.

#### Plan of Discourse.

*Therefore the wicked shall be condemned to fire by the final sentence. Ah! what terrible pain for them; as we shall see briefly in the first part. They shall be condemned to eternal fire. Ah! what an incomprehensible pain: the second part. The folly of the sinner in wilfully choosing that terrible fire shall be the concluding thought.*

All shall find some useful considerations in this meditation. Great God! my words are powerless; Thy grace must now speak and work with special strength and emphasis! We do not implore Thee on behalf of the unhappy wretches who are now burning in hell, for Thou hast no more grace for them; but we do beg of Thee to impel us, who are still living, so to order our lives that not one of us may have to suffer in that fire. This we beg of Thee through Mary, the Mother of mercy, and our holy guardian angels.

Of all earthly torments, that caused by fire is the worst. Of all the elements, the most active and penetrating is fire; of all torments, the worst and most intolerable is that caused by fire. The hardest stones and metals, steel and iron, brass and copper,

<sup>1</sup> Descendant in infernum viventes.—Ps. ltv. 16.

silver and gold, are melted by the heat of fire, and made like a flowing stream. To be burnt alive, singed with burning torches, torn with red-hot pincers, and roasted on burning coals were the worst tortures inflicted either by criminal judges on offenders, or by tyrants on the martyrs of Christ, who gave their blood for the faith. Our Father Eusebius Nierenberg, who was in his day a wonder of learning and piety in Spain, lay for ten years grievously ill in bed, and suffered so much in every part of his body, that there was hardly a limb that had not its own special torment; it was believed of him that he had begged of God so to afflict him in this life, that he might increase his merit by suffering the pains of purgatory before death. In all his torments, his only answer to those who used to visit and try to console him was: "It is not fire: it is not fire!" The pain I have to suffer is indeed severe, but it is not fire. His nerves were so contracted that he became quite crooked; his long lying in bed caused the flesh to become so corrupted that it had to be cut off his body; but his only cry was: "It is not fire; it will soon be over."

Why need we seek the testimony of others, my dear brethren, since we can consult our own experience on this point if we wish, and see what pain fire can cause? If one happens to burn the outer skin of the finger, it is recommended to hold the affected part to the fire to draw the heat out. The remedy is an assured one; but did any of you ever try it to see how painful it is? Oh, how the poor patient screams and bites his lips, and how often he draws his finger away! One might think he is almost on the point of losing his senses, so great is the pain he suffers. It would be almost impossible to bear it for the space of one Miserere. Yet the flesh is not even in the fire, which merely sends the heat out to it. How would it be if the finger had to be kept in the fire or on a burning coal for the space of a Miserere? Truly, there is many a one who would rather cut the finger off altogether than bear such torture. Some of you may have seen a glass-blowing establishment, or a smelting-furnace, in which iron and copper are melted? Is it not a grizzly sight to see the seething, hissing mass of molten flame? Not long ago I stood before a brew-kettle, and saw the fire underneath, which was not at all equal to that of a smelting-furnace. I wished to throw in a piece of wood, but the heat was so great that I was glad to abandon my intention. O my God! thought I; how would it be

As we  
know by ex-  
perience.

if I were thrown bodily into that fire? I could not live long in it, certainly, for in a moment I should be suffocated. But if God were to prolong my life therein by a miracle only for the space of one Ave Maria, how could I endure that pain even for such a short time? And if I had to spend a whole hour in the flames? Or a whole day, or a month, or a year? The bare thought made me shudder with horror! But I could not help thinking at the same time: what is it all compared to the fire of hell? It is only a mere shade, a fire painted on the wall, if the holy doctors of the Church, holy Writ, and reason itself deserve credence.

But the fire  
of hell is  
far more  
painful and  
terrible.

So it is; all the fire we have ever seen or could see on earth, or picture to our imaginations, is only a thin smoke in comparison with the intensity and activity of the fire of hell. Truly, says St. Bernard, those mountains of sulphur that vomit forth flames and destroy whole countries; the fiery rain that an angry God poured down from heaven on the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrha, which burnt up at once a whole country; that furnace in Babylon, of which the flames rose to the height of forty-nine cubits; all these things are nothing compared to hell, or else they are mere chimneys or sparks from the infernal fire;<sup>1</sup> such are the words of the Saint. The holy martyr, St. Lawrence, jested with his executioners as he lay on the gridiron for a few hours at the farthest. Other martyrs, acting on the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, did not wait for the executioner, but of their own free will leaped into the burning pile as if it were a bed of down; others took up the glowing coals and heaped them on their bare heads, as if to crown and adorn themselves; others sang joyous melodies in the midst of the flames. So little did they think of earthly fire, if they could only escape the far more terrible fire of hell, in which there is no singing or laughing, but only howling, weeping, and gnashing of teeth.

The reason  
of this.

And the reason of this is evident; for all our fire on earth is only a natural element, which can work and torture only according to its ordinary natural strength, and can burn nothing but material bodies. The fire of hell, on the other hand, is an element raised miraculously above its natural powers, so that it burns and tortures not merely bodies, but also souls and pure spirits. Our earthly fire after a short time deadens sensibility and consumes the body to ashes, but the fire of hell has received from the Creator the peculiar property of devouring and at the

<sup>1</sup> Fumariola quædam, et ignis æterni missilia.

same time preserving what it devours, of tormenting and yet never destroying what it tortures, of burning and yet never consuming what it burns. It does not destroy what it burns, says Tertullian. Our fire is kindled by weak creatures; the infernal fire by the Almighty God. "I...will refine them as silver is refined,"<sup>1</sup> says the Lord by the Prophet Zacharias. I Myself shall burn and torture the wicked man who is delivered over to My justice. Thus we may say that the divine omnipotence is the soul of this fire; It lights it, fans it, and, as Tertullian says, excites it to the highest pitch according to the fulness of the Godhead. It is kindled by an angry, embittered, and now implacable, avenging God, whose chastising justice shall be as sharp and severe in the next life as His long-suffering mercy is mild and meek in this. Such is the threat He utters by the wise Ecclesiasticus: "For mercy and wrath are with Him....According as His mercy is, so His correction."<sup>2</sup> Therefore this fire is so terrible that it comprises in itself all imaginable torments, so that from the severity of the punishment we may understand how far the vengeance of an offended and Almighty God surpasses any chastisement inflicted by a mere creature. Therefore Tertullian calls the fire of hell a rich treasure of torments hidden in the bowels of the earth.<sup>3</sup>

Now if our earthly fire can cause such pain, that one may not hold his finger in the flame of a wax candle for the space of one Miserere; who of us, my dear brethren, shall be able to dwell in the midst of the raging flames of hell, compared to which all our fire is but a shadow? And yet the reprobate man shall be buried in this flame; that is, he shall be covered and surrounded with it on all sides, and shall have to remain so for all eternity. Holy Writ always represents this fire to us by most terrible pictures, and by the awful effects it produces; it is a place where a fiery shower falls from above like a stream on the damned, and inundates them from below: "Burning coals shall fall upon them; thou wilt cast them down into the fire."<sup>4</sup> Elsewhere it is described as a madly rushing torrent, which drowns the wicked in its foaming and raging waves: "The breath of the Lord as a torrent of brimstone kindling it."<sup>5</sup> Again it is likened to a fierce dragon that bites, tears, and devours: "Thou shalt make them

If earthly fire causes intolerable pain, what must the fire of hell be?

<sup>1</sup> *Uram eos sicut uritur argentum.*—Zach. xiii. 9.

<sup>2</sup> *Misericordia enim et ira est cum illo... Secundum misericordiam suam, sic correctio illius.*—Ecclesi. xvi. 12, 13.

<sup>3</sup> *Ignis arcani subterraneus ad poenam thesaurus.*

<sup>4</sup> *Cadent super eos carbones, in ignem dejicies eos.*—Ps. cxxxix. 11.

<sup>5</sup> *Flatus Domini sicut torrens sulphuris.*—Is. xxx. 33.

as an oven of fire, in the time of Thy anger: the Lord shall trouble them in His wrath, and fire shall devour them.”<sup>1</sup> Our dear Saviour uses a strange mode of expression in the Gospel of St. Matthew: after having exhorted us rather to cut off the hand or foot, and tear out the eye that might lead us into sin, and thus to enter blind and lame into heaven, than having eyes, hands, and feet, to be hurled into hell, He adds these wonderful words: “For every one shall be salted with fire.”<sup>2</sup> That is to say, as fish that is salted in a barrel is so completely penetrated by the salt that no part of it remains unsalted, so also they who are condemned to hell shall be tormented by fire, not merely on the outside of their bodies, but in every part of them. They shall be “salted with fire.” Oh! wo to thee, sinner, who art now given up to carnal sins; if thou dost not do timely penance, thou shalt one day be a burning coal in this fire; that body of thine, corrupted by the filth of four passions, shall be completely penetrated by an intolerable heat, that will pierce thee through like a glowing iron; thy flesh shall be roasted, the marrow in thy bones melted, thy brain shall boil and seethe in thy head, and, like the iron bull that Phalaris invented to be heated from the outside with burning coals, nothing but flames of fire shall burst forth from thy mouth, and nose, and eyes, and ears. Thus shalt thou be in hell surrounded with fire, above and below, on the right and on the left, inside and outside; thou shalt be more fire than the fire itself! O fire! what a terrible torment thou art! O fire of hell! what a far more terrible torment art thou! O eternal fire of hell! what am I now to think and say of thee? That we shall consider in the

### Second Part.

It would be tolerable in some degree if it were ever to end; but it is eternal.

To burn in fire is a fearful torment, but it is still tolerable; it is the lot of even the chosen friends and children of God, the poor souls in purgatory, and indeed they endure the fire with the utmost patience and love of God. What a terrible torment it is to be slowly burnt alive! Yet even that is endurable, for St. Lawrence suffered it and actually laughed and jested in the midst of his martyrdom. But to live always in fire; to have a fiery house for one's dwelling; flames for one's bed and covering;

<sup>1</sup> Ponēs eos ut cilicū ignis in tempore vultus tui: Dominus in ira sua conturbabit eos, et devorabit eos ignis.—Ps. xx. 10.

<sup>2</sup> Omnis enim ignis salietur.—Mark ix. 48.



never to die in that fire; never to be released from it; never to have any alleviation of one's torments, to burn forever: that is at the same time terrible and incomprehensible! O truly! let hell be far hotter than the Holy Scriptures describe it; let its pains and torments be increased a thousand-fold; let them last for countless millions of years; all that would be nothing as long as the fearful "forever" is wanting. If the fire of hell would only come to an end some time or other; if I could now go to the lost souls, and say to them with truth: your torments, O unhappy wretches! shall indeed last for a long time, but sooner or later they shall end; I should make a heaven out of a hell, and fill it with songs of gratitude and praise, instead of curses and blasphemies. But, alas! unhappy souls, this hope is not for you; you must burn forever and ever, for all eternity! My dear brethren, I acknowledge that this is a sad, melancholy, and gruesome thought; I feel it so myself. But what of that? We must necessarily give it our serious consideration. What would it help us to refuse to think of it, or to hear of it? Would the fire of hell be thus rendered less painful, or of shorter duration? Should we have less reason for fearing and avoiding it? Oh, you think, such a subject is enough to take all pleasure out of one's life! Would to God that we had no pleasure in sin; then might we laugh at the thought of hell; and for that very reason we should often think of the torments of the damned, so that, being filled with the fear of offending God, we should not run the risk of having to burn in that terrible fire of hell. But you fill us with fear! And if I do so, is it not an infallible truth that there is the eternal fire of hell appointed for the impenitent sinner; an article of faith revealed by God? I do not make things worse than they are. If it gives you any pleasure, I can make them far better. Suppose that in hell there is no other punishment than the gridiron of St. Lawrence, nay, nothing worse than the flame of a torch or of a wax candle to torment the reprobate unceasingly on only one part of the body; and alas! that that pain last forever, as we cannot deny, unless we wish to make the Lord God a deceiver, the true Church of God a liar: "The hell of fire: where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not extinguished."<sup>1</sup> "Depart from Me, you cursed, into everlasting fire!"<sup>2</sup> Let us ponder for a while on these words, and see what eternity means, and then so order our

<sup>1</sup> *Gehenna ignis: ubi vermis eorum non moritur, et ignis non extinguitur.*—Mark ix. 46, 47.

<sup>2</sup> *Discedite a me maledicti in ignem æternum!*—Matt. xxv. 41.

lives that we may never have to suffer in such a fire; for our fate in that respect depends on ourselves.

Even pleasure, when too protracted, becomes a pain.

Even a pleasure, a delight, an entertaining play, delightful music, as I have elsewhere said, and as experience proves, becomes after a time a source of weariness and discomfort. For instance, what can be more comfortable than to lie in a soft bed of down? Yet try what it would be to lie in a bed of that kind for seven or eight hours at a stretch, on one side and fully awake; you will soon see that even such a comfortable position becomes intolerable after a short time. Wonderful was the plan employed by a certain pious king to bring to a better way of life a courtier of his, who was living rather carelessly. He invited the man to court on a certain day, to spend the time with him in all kinds of amusements. Early in the morning he got up a grand hunting-party that lasted for a considerable time; immediately after there was a game at ball for some hours, and finally he was invited to witness a play. The courtier, wearied with such a round of amusements, was anxious to go home, but out of courtesy he had to follow the king, who went to the play. The performance lasted four hours; God be praised, he thought, at last there is an end of it! But he was mistaken; for hardly had he left the play-house when he was asked to go and hear a grand company of foreign musicians; the invitation was rather pressing, and in spite of his reluctance the poor man was obliged to accept. It seems, he said to himself with vexation, as if the king wished to put an end to me by sheer force of pleasure-seeking to-day; if another invitation follows this one, and I sincerely hope such will not be the case, it will surely finish me. But he was again disappointed; the fifth invitation came; as evening approached a ball was given in the palace, and he was told that the king awaited him, and expected him to supper afterwards. Alas, said the poor man, what is to become of me! Is there nothing but dancing for me now, and I am almost dead from fatigue? I am so tired, I can hardly stand! Your majesty, he exclaimed at length, I am most grateful for your extreme kindness to me, but for God's sake grant me a little rest; I feel quite faint. How could one expect to stand eighteen hours of amusement without a rest? What, replied the king; is that too much for you? Do you find eighteen hours of constantly changing amusement too much! If so, how will it be with you hereafter, in case you have to go to hell and spend a long eternity in unin-

interrupted pains and torments, without any alleviation or change? and unless you alter your mode of life that will most certainly be your fate.

My dear brethren, let us often think of this. If long continuance makes even pleasure painful, how intolerable must not pain itself be when it lasts long? It is painful to have a bad tooth drawn; yet it is not difficult to console the patient in such a case. Have courage, you say to him; it will soon be over; the whole thing will be done in a moment, and you will have no more pain to suffer. If it took one, two, or three hours to perform the operation, who would submit to such torture? And not only is the actual suffering of a long agony intolerable to us, but the mere sight of such agony in others fills us with pity and terror. A robber or murderer is condemned to the gallows or to the sword; if the executioner bungles in his work, and keeps the poor wretch suffering a long time, how the bystanders murmur and express their disapproval of him! Make haste! they all cry out, and put the poor fellow out of pain; do not torture him so long. Now, I ask myself, if the pain of having a tooth drawn, or of dying by the rope or the sword, is rendered so acute by being lengthened that we cannot even behold it in another person without being horrified at the sight, what must be the state of one who has to live for a long time in a burning fire? How must it be with him who has to spend not one or two hours, nor one or two days, nor one or two years, but a whole endless eternity in the terrible and most painful fire of hell?

What then must pain be when it lasts long and indeed forever?

O eternity! exclaims St. Augustine; what art thou? "Say what you will of it, and you will never have said enough."<sup>1</sup> Say that it includes as many millions of years as there are stars in the firmament, grains of sand on the sea-shore, leaves on the trees, drops of water in all the rivers in the world, "you will never have said enough;" when you have counted up that immense number, you are still far from the total of eternity. Why? Because all those things bearsome measure and proportion; thus, so many drops make a gallon, so many gallons a cask, so many casks a stream, so many streams a great river, so many rivers a sea; and the drops, no matter how small they are, can be so increased and added to that they will make an ocean. But no time, no matter how long, has any proportion to eternity. Add millions of years to it and it will not become greater; take away millions

We cannot describe eternity.

<sup>1</sup> Quidquid de æternitate dixeris, minus dicis.

from it and it will not grow less. Cain is now in hell for some thousands of years, but he has not lessened his eternity by a moment; he can say: I have now been burning in hell for so many thousands of years; but he cannot say: now I have one hour less to suffer. Eternity remains just as long as it was when he first entered hell.

**Explained  
by similes.**

O my God! what is this that I hear? Is it then irrevocably fixed with Thee never for all eternity to release a lost soul out of hell? Allow me to propose some conditions to Thee. How long does it not take a snail to crawl a mile? Now do Thou, O Lord! keep a snail alive for the necessary time, allow him to change his position only once a year, and let him continue that until he has wandered over the whole earth; how many years he would take to do that Thou alone canst tell. But when all these years are at an end, will not the lost soul have suffered enough in hell? No; not enough yet. Create, O Lord! a heap of millet-seed as large as heaven and earth; let an ant come once every thousand years and take away one grain from the heap (ah, unhappy Cain, only five grains would now be taken away since you have been in hell!); how many years would elapse before a heap of grains as large as this church would be thus carried off, to say nothing of a heap great enough to fill heaven and earth? And yet, suppose it all carried away to the last grain, and it should come to an end some time; gracious God! even then shall there be no end to the fire of the damned? No; even then there shall be no end, and that fire shall burn as it did in the beginning. Mercy, O God! At least when the soul has suffered as long as it takes a sparrow, that is allowed merely to wet his beak but once in a hundred thousand years, as long as it takes him to drink dry all the rivers and seas in the world; at least then, I say, Thy justice will be satisfied? No; there is no mercy to be hoped for! That soul must burn forever! Yet permit me once again; I will make eternity long enough for Thee! Suppose the whole earth to be one vast brazen ball, and Thou canst make it so with one act of Thy will; let the lost soul come once in a million of years with a small hammer, and strike one blow at this ball, and continue that until he has worn away the whole mass; wilt Thou allow that soul to burn all that time? Truly I will! But when that time is at an end, will not that suffice? Hear, ye reprobate, at the end of that long period you will be released! Are you satisfied? Ah, would that even that hope

were left us! But what dost Thou say, O Lord? No! even then there shall be no end to their eternity; nor shall they have an hour less to suffer. Have done with those foolish conditions; they are but halting similes that can give no idea of eternity. The reprobate shall burn in hell forever, that is, always, without end, unceasingly, as long as I am God. O “always”! O long eternity! as long as God is God! Here my mind stands amazed, my understanding is baffled, my reason is nowhere! Well may I cry out with Thy Prophet, O Lord! “Who knoweth the power of Thy anger: and for Thy fear Thy wrath can number?”<sup>1</sup> How terrible it is to fall into the hands of an eternal, living God, who is always embittered against the dead sinner, always taking vengeance on him, and whose punishments are at the same time most just!

O sinners! who are actually in the state of sin, and are not yet earnestly minded to make a good confession and to amend your lives, what are you thinking of if you refuse to consider this truth? What have you to be afraid of if you do not fear hell? If an eternal fire cannot hold your bad passions in check, nor help you to deny yourselves a momentary pleasure, and to serve for a short time a God worthy of all love that you may gain heaven; what help is there for you then? Are you not foolish, senseless, mad, wantonly to sin and put yourselves in such a woful state, that if you die therein you will have to burn in hell forever without any mercy? Tell me, any one of you, if wealth or pleasure were offered you on the condition that you should lie for a whole day on a glowing gridiron like St. Lawrence; how much would you ask as compensation for that torture? Would ten thousand pounds suffice? or ten years spent in all kinds of pleasure? Eh! you would exclaim; I would not suffer such torture for all the riches and joys of earth! But if you had to suffer for only one hour, would you then agree? No, you think; even that short time would seem too much for you. And I believe you, and am certain that if you agreed to accept the condition, you would repent the very first moment, without waiting to feel the pain of the fire, and you would take back your word, and renounce all riches and pleasures, rather than stand such a martyrdom even for a quarter of an hour. O man! where is your human reason? For all the goods of the world you would

Folly of the sinner in choosing eternal fire for the sake of worthless things.

<sup>1</sup> Quis novit potestatem iræ tuæ: et præ timore tuo iram tuam dinumerare?—Ps. lxxxix. 11, 12.

not spend one quarter of an hour in a temporal fire; and for the sake of a miserable coin that you gain or keep unjustly, you choose the eternal fire of hell! You would not spend an hour in a temporal fire for all the joys of earth; but for a wretched, brutal pleasure, that often consists merely in the imagination and vanishes in a few moments, you choose the eternal fire of hell! For all the honors of the world you would not spend one hour in a temporal fire, but you would rather burn forever in hell than restore the injured honor of another; you would rather be in hell forever than honestly disclose your sins in confession; rather burn in hell than forgive your enemy or beg his forgiveness; rather be in hell than abandon that person who is a proximate occasion of sin to you; rather be in hell than give up that unlawful intimacy; rather be in hell than remove that stumbling-block; rather be in hell forever than give up the habit of cursing and drunkenness? Where is your reason, I ask you again; or where is your faith? Do you not believe in hell? Then you need not believe in God; for one as well as the other is an article of our faith.

No one can undertake to endure that fire.

Would that I had lungs of iron and a voice of thunder, that I might go to all the towns and countries of the world, and cry out in the ears and hearts of all men those words of the Prophet Isaias: "Which of you can dwell with devouring fire? which of you shall dwell with everlasting burnings?"<sup>1</sup> Would that I might impress those words on all, so that no one might be hurled into the fire of hell! "Which of you can dwell with devouring fire?" Can you, O luxurious man! who cannot bear the least inconvenience, who cannot endure to hear a dog howling, a child crying, or a fly buzzing round your ears? How will you be able to hear, and at the same time to feel the crackling and rattling of your bones in the lake of boiling brimstone; and that forever? You who cannot bear the approach of a poor beggar, how will you stand the intolerable stench of your body and the bodies of others burning in sulphur; and that forever? "Which of you can dwell with devouring fire?" Can you, O woman! brought up in every comfort and luxury, who so carefully avoid all that might occasion you the slightest pain? A trifling headache or tooth-ache seems intolerable to you; you cannot kneel an hour in church before the Blessed Sacrament, or stand for

<sup>1</sup> Quis poterit habitare de vobis cum igne devorante? Quis habitabit ex vobis cum ardoribus sempiternis?—Is. xxxiii. 14.

an hour to hear a sermon, you must sit down to rest; to fast and abstain for forty days seems almost an impossibility to you; an ill-fitting shoe, an ill-made feather-bed, a dish not prepared exactly to your taste, a soup too hot or too cold, is enough to excite your anger; how will you be able to hold out on a bed of fire in hell; and that forever? “Which of you can dwell with devouring fire?” Can you, O unchaste man! who spend day and night in seeking sensual gratification, and pass your time in a round of dissipation? Will you be able to stand that hellish oven, in which your body, penetrated through and through by fire, shall become fire itself? And that forever? “Which of you can dwell with devouring fire?” Can you, O vain and delicate maiden! who cannot now bear the prick of a needle without screaming; who could not bear a spark of fire, or even a drop from a burning candle on those shoulders that you expose as a source of temptation and scandal to souls? How will you be able to lie on, and hide yourself, and wallow in those burning coals of hell fire, not for a day, or a month, or a year, or a hundred thousand years, but for all eternity? Which of you, my dear brethren, can dwell with devouring fire?

Mercy, O God, mercy! No; there is not one of us who can do that; not one of us who can make up his mind to it! We will do penance, and that at once for our past sins. Ah, we want no hell! no fire! no eternal fire! We are ready for any other punishment, O angry God! only save us from eternal fire! From this moment we renounce sin and begin to lead new lives, so that we may escape this fire, and come to Thee in eternal joys. Such should be the thoughts, the resolutions, the actions of all, if there are any such here present, who are in the state of sin. If in future any occasion, temptation, passion, or inclination, no matter what it may be, should try to lead us into sin, let us at once ask ourselves in thought, can I then burn forever in devouring fire? But if I now choose to commit this sin, I prepare that fire for myself. No, no; I will not be so cruel to myself. Or if we find that thought fruitless, we might imitate the pious hermit who, when he was tempted to carnal sins, ran at once to the fire, put his hand into the flame, and said to himself: see how you can stand fire and flame; and if you cannot bear it for a short time, how will you bear to have your whole body burning forever in hell? Are you still inclined to sin?

Therefore  
we will do  
penance  
and amend  
our lives.

Think of the same fire, too, O you troubled and oppressed souls! A lesson for

**the afflicted.** when your crosses and trials seem too hard for you, and you are on the point of losing patience and giving way to cursing or desperation; think and say with Father Nierenberg, ah, this is not fire! It is not the fire of hell! It is not an eternal fire! How well God means with me in punishing me as a father here by this cross, so that He may spare me hereafter in eternity. Shall I then, by my impatience, turn this temporal suffering into an eternal one? No, Lord! whatever Thou sendest me, I shall willingly receive from Thy hand, and readily suffer it; I have deserved much more! "Here burn, here cut, that Thou mayest spare me in eternity!"

**Conclusion  
for the just  
who formerly  
sinned  
grievously.**

And finally, you just and pious souls, who have probably in the past committed grievous sins for which you have done sincere penance, think and say with me: O good Lord and God! what do I not owe Thee? I had at that time, as Thou well knowest, deserved that terrible everlasting fire! How many are burning therein who have committed the same, and perhaps fewer sins than I have! Why am I not burning with them? If Thou hadst allowed me to die while in that miserable state, alas, I should now be with them in hell! Oh! "The mercies of the Lord I will sing forever."<sup>1</sup> With Thy Prophet David I will praise that great mercy which has spared my life, given me time for grace and repentance, and saved me from everlasting fire. If, O Lord! Thou wert to do what Thou never wilt do, and release a lost soul from hell, and bring it again to life, how grateful would not that soul be to Thee! No penance so great, no punishment so severe, no torment so long that he would not endure it with joy until the last day. And how he would praise, bless, honor, and love Thee! How carefully and exactly he would guard against offending Thee again by even the least sin! How humble he would be even towards the lowliest! How zealously he would serve his beneficent God and Saviour! Ah, my Lord and my God! am I less bound to Thee now? Hast Thou not released me, and that often too, from hell, which I have merited as well as any lost soul? Can I then dare to be in the future cold and tepid in Thy service? Should I not shudder at the thought of offending Thee even by a deliberate venial sin? Should I ever complain that the crosses Thou sendest me here on earth are too heavy and severe? Should I not love Thee above all things with my whole heart? Yes, I acknowledge it, O God of mercy! My

<sup>1</sup> *Misericordias Domini in æternum cantabo.—Ps. lxxxviii. 2.*



whole life long and for all eternity I will never forget this clemency of Thine. In all circumstances, at all times, in adversity as well as in prosperity, this thought shall impel me to remain faithful to Thee, to fulfil Thy holy will zealously, to further Thy honor and glory whenever I have the opportunity, until, as I hope and desire, I shall see and praise Thee, my Saviour, in everlasting joys. Amen.

*Another introduction to the same sermon for the second Sunday of Advent.*

**Text.**

*Mortui resurgunt.*—Matt. xi. 5.

“The dead rise again.”

**Introduction.**

The raising of the dead was well enough in the days when Our Lord was still on earth as a mortal Man, when at the prayers of sorrowing friends and relations He caused the dead to come to life. But how will it be on the last day, when the terrible trumpet shall sound forth the command: “Arise, ye dead, and come to judgment!” Sinners, what will be your feelings, when, having risen from your graves, you will hear the awful sentence by which God shall banish you from His sight for all eternity: “Depart from Me, you cursed,”<sup>1</sup> as we have considered on the last occasion? But still more awful will be the other part of that final sentence: whereto shall you be condemned? etc. *Continues as above.*

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**FORTIETH SERMON.**

**ON THE THOUGHTS OF THE REPROBATE IN HELL.**

**Subject.**

The reprobate shall think in hell during all eternity: first, I might have gained eternal happiness, and have not wished to do so; secondly, now I should wish to be happy, and shall never have the means of becoming so for all eternity.—*Preached on the first Sunday in Lent.*

<sup>1</sup> *Discedite a me maledicti.*—Matt. xxv. 41.

**Text.**

*Ecce nunc tempus acceptabile; ecce nunc dies salutis.*—II. Cor. vi. 2.

“Behold, now is the acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.”

**Introduction.**

On last Sunday we meditated on the everlasting fire of hell. I do not doubt that many of you were filled with an unusual dread, and made most earnest resolutions to do everything to escape that fire. And to those I say in the words of St. Paul, “Behold, now is the acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.” Now, if we wish, we can save ourselves from eternal flames. Have we sinned? Behold, now is the time to do penance and to serve God with zeal; for that is the only means of escaping hell. But if we allow this time of grace to pass by, and go into eternity without having done penance, then all is up with us! Never for all eternity shall we be able to entertain the slightest hope of escaping the torments of hell. Ah, how is it with you now? What are your thoughts on this matter? If I were to address that question to some reprobate sinner, after he has been sentenced to hell by divine justice and has made his first entry into that place of torments, I could easily guess what his answer would be. Alas! he would say, I am lost, and lost forever; but what tortures me most is the fact that I have allowed the acceptable time of salvation to pass by unprofited of. I could have escaped hell; I could have gained the happiness of heaven; but I did not wish it. Now I should willingly escape out of hell, and be in heaven; but it is impossible, and will be eternally impossible. These, my dear brethren, are the two thoughts which, to my mind, cause the reprobate the greatest torture, and if we keep them constantly before our minds, we shall not easily run the risk of being sentenced to hell. To that end I now select them as the subject of this meditation.

**Plan of Discourse.**

*I could have been happy, and did not wish it: a thought full of remorse and bitterness; such shall be the subject of the first and longer part. Now I should willingly be happy, but shall not be able to gain happiness for all eternity: a thought full of despair;*

*as we shall see in the second part. Thus the thoughts of the damned are a hell in the midst of hell. My dear Christians, let us now earnestly wish, while we can, that we may not have to wish fruitlessly hereafter; such shall be the conclusion.*

Give us Thy powerful grace to this end, O good God! We ask it of Thee through the intercession of Thy Mother and of our holy guardian angels.

To be poor and miserable through sheer necessity, which one could not foresee or avoid, as is the case, for instance, with a Christian who, without any fault of his, is made a prisoner and slave by Turks; that is indeed a very wretched state; yet the sufferer can console himself with the thought that he could not help his condition, and that what happened to him was permitted by God; therefore he can arm himself with patience. But to be poor and miserable through one's own fault and mere wantonness, and when it was easy to have avoided falling into that wretched condition and to have attained a more prosperous one, that is a source of bitter remorse in which no consolation is to be found, of a repentance that has no other fruit but self-torture. Do you remember, my dear brethren, how it was with the Egyptians in olden times? Seven fruitful years followed each other in succession, in which the harvest was so abundant that the barns were not able to hold it. Meanwhile the Egyptians saw the great diligence that Joseph employed in buying and collecting corn daily, but not one of them thought of following his example; they preferred to sell their produce for a very low price and thus get rid of it to others. But how was it with them afterwards, when the years of plenty had passed, and were followed by seven years of scarcity? They suffered from hunger and want. "The people cried to Pharaoh for food."<sup>1</sup> So great was their distress that they had to give away all their money, their cattle, goods, and lands, and even themselves into perpetual slavery in order to get food. Think now how great must have been the remorse of those people when they remembered the fruitful times in which they were so abundantly provided with everything. Oh, then we might have kept our own crops and added to them at a slight cost; would that we had done so; we should not now have to suffer hunger and misery; but we were too careless! Remember the unhappy people who were in the world at the time of the deluge. How bitter their remorse must have been when they

To be miserable by one's own fault causes bitter remorse.

<sup>1</sup> *Clamavit populus ad Pharaonem, alimenta petens.*—Gen. xli. 55.

## 24 *On the Thoughts of the Reprobate in Hell.*

saw themselves miserably perishing without any one to help them, and recollected how truly God had warned them beforehand by Noe, as well with words and earnest exhortations as with the blows of the hammer that rang in their ears for a hundred years, while the ark was in course of construction; but they neglected and laughed at all those warnings! Remember the sons-in-law of Lot. How painful their regret must have been when they saw the fire fall from heaven and burn the inhabitants of Sodom, and recollected, while they themselves were being consumed, how Lot had warned them a little before, and begged of them to leave the city with him in order to save their lives: but instead of profiting by his exhortations, they only laughed at and ridiculed them! All these people, when it was too late, were obliged to cry out, We might easily have avoided the danger; but through our own fault and mere wantonness we did not wish to do so!

Such is the case with the damned, for they might have been happy had they wished.

But what is the seven years' famine of Egypt compared to the eternal hunger and thirst of the damned? What is the temporal destruction caused by the deluge compared to eternal ruin? What the devouring fire of Sodom compared to the raging but not consuming flames among the demons? What is the supply of corn that the Egyptians might have had, if they had wished, or the preservation of temporal, mortal life that men might easily have secured, had they so desired, during the flood and the destruction of Sodom, compared to the ineffable joys of heaven, that the reprobates in hell might have had if they had wished? This is the bitter thought, the agonizing remorse that tortures the lost soul on its first entry into hell, and will continue to torment it for all eternity: I was able, but was unwilling! Eternal fire, and everything that is terrible in thee, I could easily have escaped thee, but did not wish! Elect children of God! I might have been with you, but I did not wish! Priceless joys of heaven, it lay in my power to gain you, but I did not wish to have you! God of all happiness! I might have possessed Thee forever, but I did not wish it. I could have done all this, I cannot deny it, for who could have prevented me? Otherwise there must have been something wanting in God, inasmuch as He did not desire my salvation; or else the necessary means were not given me to save my soul; or else the demons and wicked men prevented me; or time and opportunity were wanting me to use the means provided. But none of these impediments stood in my way.

I cannot lay the least blame on my God, who (as my faith taught me during life, and as I now know to be the truth) has always had the earnest wish and desire, as far as in Him lay, to save all mankind, without exception, and therefore to save me also. This was the end He had in view in making me to His image and likeness, in preference to so many others, infinite in number, whom He left in their nothingness; this is shown by the unheard-of love that forced Him, "for us men and for our salvation," to come down from heaven, to assume our mortal nature, to live a poor, humble, and contemptible life in the eyes of the world for three and thirty years, to suffer all sorts of discomfort, hunger, thirst, ridicule and mockery, thorns and scourges, even to the painful death of the cross; and all that merely to save us from the hell we had deserved, and to open for us the gates of heaven that were closed by the sin of our first parents. And moreover, besides what is common to me with all men, oh, how rejoiced the Almighty would have been to have had me with Himself in heaven! For in preference to so many millions like me, without any preceding merits of my own, He called me to the Christian and one true Catholic faith in which alone salvation is to be found; and in that He caused me to be born and brought up. Heathens, Turks, Jews, heretics who are with me in hell, not even you have any reproach to make to your Creator on that head; for He wished you too to be saved; you might have come to the true light, and thereby to heaven, had you so wished! Much less reason have I to blame Him for my damnation; for I have had the advantage of you in the frequent graces that God gave me. If many of you had enjoyed from childhood the light that shone on me, you would now rejoice among the chosen children of God; nay, many of you found the way to heaven by a dim, obscure light; while I, a child of the light, who walked in the full noon-day, am now lying in everlasting darkness! "Son," the Almighty can with reason say to me, in the words of Abraham to the rich glutton, "remember that thou didst receive good things in thy lifetime." Remember the great graces and illuminations you received from Me during your life. And how could I deny that? How many good inspirations have I not had to deter me from evil and urge me to good? How much interior uneasiness have I not felt when I wished to sin? How much anguish and remorse after

God wished  
to make  
them happy.

<sup>1</sup> *Pili, recordare quia recepisti bona in vita tua.*—Luke xvi. 25.

the sin was committed? How many years has not the good God borne with me while I was in the state of sin, although He might have hurled me into this pit of hell after the first sin I was guilty of? How lovingly has He not knocked at the door of my heart, and exhorted me as a father to return to His friendship by true repentance? These were all sure signs that God did not wish to condemn me, but to make me eternally happy. Nay, this very fire of hell in which I am now burning, that He so often threatened me with if I provoked His anger, this fire of which I have so often read in books to my great terror, and heard in sermons, this is an infallible proof that God wished to have me in heaven. If I had but considered this as I now know it, I should not ever feel this fire. No, my God! I may not and cannot lay the blame of my damnation on Thee; it is not Thy fault that I am not in heaven. These words of Thine are ever in my ears: "How often would I have gathered together thy children!" and I acknowledge the truth of that oft-repeated assertion of Thine: "How often would I have gathered together thy children. . . and thou wouldst not."<sup>1</sup> Yes! I might have done it, as far as Thou art concerned! Why then have I not done it?

They were fully provided with the means of salvation.

Have I perhaps failed to find the right way to heaven? Perhaps I was not provided with the means necessary to get there? Ah, no! What was said to the young man in the gospel held good for me, too. "But if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments."<sup>2</sup> Why have I not kept the commandments? Have I perhaps been ignorant of them? Have they not often been explained to me in the Christian Doctrine and in sermons? and if I was ignorant of anything regarding them, was it not my own fault, since I could and should have known all about them? Can I say that they were too difficult for me to observe? But I should be contradicted by all the elect in heaven, who entered there before my death, amongst whom there are many who were weak and subject to evil inclinations as I was, people of every condition, age, sex, and nation, who have all been obliged to walk the same way of the divine commandments, for there is no other way of arriving at happiness. They were able to do that; why was not I? What a multitude of pious Christians lived with me, who daily gave me the benefit of their good ex-

<sup>1</sup> Quoties volui congregare filios tuos. . . et nolui-ti. — Matt. xxiii. 37.

<sup>2</sup> Si autem vis ad vitam ingredi, serva mandata. — Ibid. xix. 17.

ample; who so often put me to shame, when I considered the edifying lives they were leading? They were able to do that; why was not I? And have not I myself been able, during my youth and after having arrived at manhood, to keep myself whole months and years free from grievous sin? Have I not often, for vanity's sake, to adorn my person, to please some mortal, to satisfy my evil desires, nay, to commit a sin, undergone more discomfort, uneasiness, and difficulty than I have ever experienced in keeping the commandments? And in the midst of a Catholic land, the holy sacraments, that were ready for me at any moment, the table of the Lord, the flesh and blood of my Saviour, the merits of His bitter passion and death, which were at my command daily, the many spiritual books that I might have read, the sermons and exhortations that I heard or might have heard: all these were so many powerful means of grace to enable me to keep the commandments all the easier. And if I had not had even one of them, I still had full permission to pray to and call upon my God. This one means was powerful enough to obtain for me the divine assistance and all the graces I needed, according to God's own infallible promise. Therefore I cannot say that it was through want of means that I failed to gain heaven, and was condemned to this fire.

Ye demons of hell, who have so often tempted me! wicked men, who have so often seduced and led me into sin! are you perhaps the reason why I was unable to use the means appointed me for gaining eternal happiness? But what am I asking? You would rather have been a help to me to that end, if I had been really desirous of it. For your temptations and allurements gave me occasion and opportunity to increase my merit and glory in heaven, if I had only resisted and overcome them, as I might always have done with the aid of God's grace that was ready for me at any moment. And what then is the cause of my misery? Why am I not in heaven?

Which no man or devil could prevent them from using.

Was opportunity or time wanting to me to use the prescribed means in order to serve God, do good and escape hell? But what beautiful opportunities I have had! All the churches were open to me, inviting me to pray to God, to praise and bless Him. All the confessionals were at my service, exhorting me to enter, and in the spirit of repentance to lay down the burden of my sins. All the bells called to me in the morning to offer the holy Mass to God and to join in the usual devotions. All preachers had

They had opportunity enough of using them.

prepared themselves on Sundays and holy-days for me as well as for others, to speak to our hearts, to warn us against hell, to exhort us to good, to deter us from sin, to urge us to zeal in the service of God, and to lead us to heaven. Ah, would that I had been diligent in attending to them! What beautiful exhortations and salutary doctrine I might have received from them for the good of my soul! Was I rich and blessed by God with temporal means? That very wealth furnished me with the opportunity of heaping up vast treasures in heaven by generosity to the poor. Was I poor and needy? My very poverty gave me opportunity of practising patience and resignation to the divine will, and thereby making all the surer of gaining great wealth in heaven. Did I abound in joy and consolation? Then I had occasion humbly to thank my God and to serve Him all the more zealously. Was I laden with many crosses and trials? Then I had in my hands a ladder by which I might have mounted, through Christian patience, all the higher in heaven. Even my daily business and occupation, no matter how onerous, did not of itself in the least hinder me in the divine service, but rather helped me therein; for I need only have kept a pure conscience and performed my duties with a good intention for God's sake; had I done so, while working, studying, dealing with the cares of my state, eating, drinking, or sleeping, I should have been serving my God, doing His will, and earning a great reward in heaven.

And time  
enough.

Ah, what a beautiful time I have had in the twenty, thirty, forty, fifty, sixty years that were given me on earth! There was not a moment of them in which, if I had so willed, I might not have gained eternal glory in heaven! If I had made a good use of only the fiftieth part of the time I spent in vanity, idleness, and sin, how rich I should now be in eternity! What a high place I should have among the blessed in heaven! O fool that I am! and how I reproach myself when I think of it! Even in the last moment of my life, when my friends and my increasing weakness announced to me the approach of death, the merciful God was ready, if I had only been willing, to receive me again into His grace and friendship, although for the greater part of my life I had treated Him as my worst enemy; there was still time for me to repent of and blot out my sins, to be reconciled to my enemy, to restore ill-gotten goods, to remove out of the house the proximate occasion of sin; there was still time to detest and



confess my sins, to escape hell, and gain heaven! So that there was nothing in heaven, on earth, or under the earth that could have come between me and eternal happiness; and I might have been happy! Truly I might have been so, and much easier than many of the elect, who received far fewer graces and benefits from God than I did. I might have saved my soul much easier than many of you penitent sinners, who are now saints in heaven, and whose sins were more numerous and grievous than mine! Ah, if I had only done penance like you!

Why then did I not do so? Why am I not in eternal joys like those others? Why am I now in hell? I alone am to blame! The will was wanting to me! This is the cruel memory that now tortures me and that will never cease to torment me for all eternity. The will was wanting; I did not wish to hearken to the voice of God; I closed my eyes to the light; I rejected good inspirations; I disregarded the warnings of my conscience; I refused to profit by the countless means of salvation that were offered me; I made no use of the opportunities I had of doing good. Priests and preachers of God! I avoided your salutary doctrine and exhortations; I refused to go to sermons because I did not wish to be aroused from the sleep of sin, and if I heard them sometimes it was on matters that made no impression on my conscience, or otherwise if they did touch on my vices, I either absented myself because I did not wish to be troubled or made better, or else I treated them as mere fables and priestly fictions. Ah, now I am only too well persuaded of the truth of what God said by your lips about the vanity of the world and other matters that I refused to believe in then. Now, when it is too late, I see that the pains of hell, that you so often described to me in order to inspire me with a salutary fear, are infinitely greater and more intolerable than you pictured them to me. I had not the will when it was so easy for me! I wilfully followed the inspirations of the devil, the allurements of wicked men, the perverse usages and customs of the world. I have wasted my precious time in sin; I have deferred repentance from day to day, until no more time was left to me. Wretch that I am! Would that I had done right when I had the chance! Where was my reason? Who blinded and bewitched me to such an extent? Is it possible, is it really the case that I have refused the eternal joys of heaven, although they were offered me? Is it really true that when I might have escaped hell I was unwilling to do so?

But they did  
not wish it.

Because  
they pre-  
ferred  
worthless  
things.

And why was I so foolish? Why have I refused eternal happiness? Why have I chosen hell as my portion? For the sake of a handful of earthly wealth, which I preferred to the sovereign Good! For the sake of a brutal lust, which ended almost as soon as it had begun! For the sake of a point of honor, on which I was unwilling to yield! For the sake of some vanity, that I did not wish to renounce to please God, thus gradually depriving myself of His grace and favor! For the sake of a wretched habit of swearing and cursing, that I have not tried to overcome! For the sake of the sins of others, that I have not hindered when I could and should have done so! For the sake of my children, whom I brought up badly and to whom I allowed too much liberty! That is all I have gained by the loss of my eternal happiness! That is all for which I am now burning in the everlasting fire of hell! All this took place many hundred years ago, and I am still lying in this lake of fire. O accursed person! would that I had never laid eyes on her! Accursed pleasure! would that I had never known it! Accursed avarice and pride, would that you had been strangers to me! Ah, if I had only been wise when the time for me to will was there; but now it is impossible for me and shall be so forever! O thought! O memory! O painful recollection! into what depths of despair you drive me! I would wish to be happy, but can never realize my wish for all eternity! Let us, dear Christians, briefly consider these thoughts of the reprobate in the

### Second Part.

This very  
thought fills  
them with  
despair; for  
they would  
now.

Nothing is more apt to make us despair than to be always willing, and never to have the power of carrying out our wishes. Consider the state of two persons who are enamoured of each other, who would willingly be always in each other's company, but are kept apart by their parents. What torments of longing they suffer night and day; how they sigh and moan and give expression to fruitless desires, knowing all the time that they have not the slightest hope of seeing their wish gratified! What then must be the unspeakable torment of the damned soul in hell who is filled with desire for all eternity, and for all eternity can never attain the object of his desire nor have the slightest hope of attaining it? This is what St. Bernard says: "What more miserable than always to wish for what you can never have, and always to hate what will be always with you?" And such is the state

of the lost soul: "for all eternity he will not have what he desires, and yet for all eternity he will have to suffer what he hates."<sup>1</sup> Who doubts that the lost soul would willingly be happy and be released from hell? On the one hand the clear knowledge of the eternal happiness from which he is excluded, and on the other the actual experience of infinite misery in which he is, must inspire him with the greatest desire of enjoying the one and being delivered from the other. Of eternal happiness I have said on a former occasion that when we mortals enter into eternity our eyes are opened for the first time, and we see clearly what we now behold only darkly by faith and cannot properly appreciate, namely, that the possession of God is our only supreme Good. Then the sinner to his own eternal torment shall be able to say to himself the words of the Prophet Jeremias: "Know thou, and see that it is an evil and a bitter thing for thee to have left the Lord thy God."<sup>2</sup> With regard to his feeling the unhappy state in which he is, we have only to remember what he has to suffer in that terrible fire, even if there were no other torment in hell, as we have seen in the last meditation. In this fire he is completely immersed and buried; the flames pierce through his eyes and ears; he breathes in fire; his mouth and nostrils are filled with it; his whole body resembles a glowing iron or coal of fire, and yet it will never be consumed.

In this unspeakable torment, as we may well believe, he will unceasingly lament, and cry out: ah, would that I were out of this place! But fruitlessly; for he must remain there forever. He will recall the time of his life on earth: O beautiful years that were granted me to gain heaven; will you never return? Beautiful hours that sometimes seemed too long for me, so that I have sought amusement to pass you away; ah, would that I had now even one of you in order to free myself from this intolerable torture! Will you then never come back to me? Precious moments that I squandered in frivolity! Ah, if you were only offered me now, I should willingly give the whole world, if it were mine, for even one of you! But that happiness can never be mine for all eternity! The angel that St. John saw in the Apocalypse swears to me by the Almighty who created heaven and earth,

But they  
shall never  
be able for  
all eternity.

<sup>1</sup> Quid tam miserum, quam semper velle quod nunquam erit, semper nolle quod semper erit? In æternum non obtinebit, quod vult, et quod non vult, in æternum nihilominus sustinebit.

<sup>2</sup> Scito et vide, quia malum et amarum est reliquisse te Dominum Deum tuum.—Jerem. li. 19.

“that time shall be no longer.”<sup>1</sup> Ah, heavenly Father, he will exclaim like the rich man crying out to Abraham; Father of mercy! overflowing Fountain of sweetness, at least allow one drop of water, although that is but a small comfort, allow one drop to fall down to cool the intensity of this heat even for a moment! But not even that comfort can I hope to have for all eternity! Jesus Christ, my Saviour! think of the blood Thou hast shed for me: give me a moment's rest and respite, a slight alleviation of my pains! No; the door is locked: I know thee not! Vain wishes and desires, that will never be fulfilled for all eternity! Ah, my God! if I cannot be with Thee, then cast me back into my original nothingness, from which Thou hast drawn me! With one breath of Thy mouth Thou hast called me into being and created me; now I only desire another breath which shall reduce me again to nothing! But in vain do I wish for this. They will seek death and not find it for eternity. So that there is nothing but despair, suffering without end, misery without end, fire without end! Accursed will that refused to will aright when thou couldst do so; now thou dost will, but shalt never be able to carry out thy wishes!

Moral lesson: we are now free to do what the damned shall eternally wish in vain to do.

My dear brethren, to my mind these remorseful and despairing thoughts shall form the most terrible torment of the damned. You can easily see the lesson we should learn from this meditation. What all the reprobate in hell are eternally wishing for and can never have, that is now in our power. What the damned did not wish for during life, alas! that is the very thing that most men on earth do not wish for, and therefore hell is daily filling with souls—two considerations that we should take deeply to heart. Of the first St. Augustine says: we receive two kinds of lives from the Creator: one here in time, the other in eternity; whether the first is to be happy or miserable rests not with us to decide; God has reserved to Himself the right of arranging all that; as to the happiness or misery of the other, it is now a matter of choice for us, and the Lord has left it to our own free will. Whether I am rich or poor, sick or well, honored or despised, in joy or in sorrow during time, depends not on me, no matter how my inclinations tend; I must wait for the providence of God to settle things for me; but whether I live in joy or misery in eternity, in heaven or in hell, that depends

<sup>1</sup> Quia tempus non erit amplius.—Apoc. x. 6.

on myself; with the help of God's grace, I can shape my own destiny in that respect.

Now, my dear-brethren, I ask: is it true, or rather is it possible that, although we can, we do not wish to be happy, and that too eternally? This is what puzzled the man who was rapt up in spirit by the angel into heaven, where the indescribable joys of the elect were shown to him: O my God! he exclaimed, what a happy life! Who can come to this place? Whoever wishes, answered the angel. What! replied the man; whoever wishes? And who would not wish to attain to such happiness? Oh, answered the angel, many, very many, nay, the greater number of men do not wish to have this happiness. Then he brought the man down to hell, where he saw to his great terror and horror the torments suffered by the damned. Alas! he asked again; who comes to this place? and again the angel answered: whoever wishes. What! is it possible for a man to be so foolish as to desire to be hurled into such a frightful den of torments? Yes; most people in the world are guilty of that folly. So it is, my dear brethren. He who wishes shall go to heaven; that is, he who orders his life so as to receive the promised reward from God. And he who wishes shall be hurled into hell; that is, all those who do not avoid sin, or who after having committed sin do not do penance while they have time. Sinner, see the folly of which you are guilty; you do not wish to be happy, and therefore you will not be so; your desire is to go to hell, and therefore hell will be your everlasting dwelling. But is it possible, I ask again, that you are so foolish and senseless? If it were in your power to order your temporal life as you wish, would you not seek to lead a life of the utmost wealth, comfort, joy, and happiness? You who think of nothing else but rest, comfort, pleasure, and self-gratification in every possible way, even in sin and vice? And yet you do not find in those things the happiness you seek in them, and you will never find it; you will never attain what you are so eager to possess. Ah, why then do you not wish and seek to be eternally happy in heaven? for that you can be if you will! But, O madness and folly! this is what you do not wish; this is what you absolutely refuse! You may tell me the contrary a thousand times, and my answer to you will be that you are not in earnest; you do not wish for heaven; you continue on in the old habits of sin; you still keep your ill-gotten goods; you refuse to give up your unlawful love, your hatred and enmity; you are

Folly of men who in spite of this do not wish to save their souls, and to escape hell.

### 34 *On the Thoughts of the Reprobate in Hell.*

as fond as ever of swearing and cursing, of drunkenness and intemperance, of pride and vanity; you put off repentance from day to day; there is no sign of amendment in you. Therefore you do not wish to be eternally happy, although you have the power of becoming so; you do not wish to go to heaven, and thus your wish is to be lost forever. O blindness and folly! O utter recklessness! Wo to you! One day you will have a far different wish, but for all eternity it will be impossible to fulfil it, and that will be one of your worst torments in hell.

Shown by  
an example.

Hear what occurred in Spain. Father John Ramirez, of our Society, was once giving a mission in a certain town. He was called to hear a sick person's confession, and she told her sins with such tears of sorrow that the Father gave her absolution, to his own great consolation. Meanwhile the companion of the Father, who had been looking on at a distance, remarked a large, black hand coming up from the side of the bed and seizing the sick person by the throat as if to choke her. When the two returned home, the companion told his superior of what had occurred; the latter examined him minutely, and found his story a probable one, whereupon he sent back Father Ramirez to the house, although it was a dark night, and recommended him gently to persuade the sick woman to make her confession again. The Father went with the same companion, but when they came near the house they heard sounds of lamentation and weeping, and were told that the sick woman had just died, and that she had lost the use of her tongue after confession and could not receive holy Communion. Father Ramirez, greatly troubled at the tidings, went to the church and prayed for the soul of the deceased before the Blessed Sacrament. During his prayer he heard a noise, and turning round he saw before him a person laden with chains and surrounded by fire. Taking courage, he spoke to her and asked her who she was. I am, she answered with a deep sigh, that unhappy woman whose confession you heard yesterday, and for whom you are now praying to God, though in vain. Some years ago I committed a sin against purity that I could never bear to tell in confession; it was a constant source of trouble to my conscience, and I was always afraid of the pains of hell in which I now am; therefore I often made the resolution of confessing it, but shame prevented me always. Moved by your sermon, I was quite determined to get that sin off my mind, but when I opened my mouth, shame again held me back.

and for that reason the just God deprived me of speech and life together; thus I am lost forever and your prayers cannot help me. And, asked the Father, what is the greatest torment you have now to suffer? My greatest torment, she replied, consists in this: that I remember how easily I might have attained eternal happiness if I had only wished, and had told the sin that was troubling me. She then disappeared, howling. See, O sinner! you who now are not willing, the same thought will be your greatest torment in hell also.

O God of goodness! grant that none of us here may have such a corrupt and perverse will. I do wish to be eternally happy; my temporal welfare I readily leave to Thy holy will and decree; but I do desire to be happy with Thee in heaven; I positively do not wish to go to hell (ah, God forbid that such should be my fate!). I have indeed lost heaven a thousand times by my sins (Thou knowest, O Lord! how true this is, unfortunately!); a thousand times I have deserved hell; but, O Lord! Thou knowest too that I repent sincerely of my sins and ardently implore Thy mercy and pardon. Therefore I hope that according to Thy promise Thou wilt bring me to Thyself in heaven; and hence while I have the power I will use the means of salvation provided for me. I will keep Thy commandments exactly, avoid sin with Thy help and grace as the greatest of all evils, and fulfil Thy holy will in all things. Away with all joys, goods, honors, and vanities; away with all creatures that might hinder me from keeping this resolution and lead me again into sin! I bid adieu to them now and forever. I will not consider how others and the majority of men live; but how I am bound to live according to Thy holy law. If this will of mine should again begin to vacillate through weakness and inconstancy, then I beg of Thee, Almighty and merciful God, in the prayer of Thy Church, to turn violently my rebellious will to Thee, that I may not be banished to that place of torments, where, although I should have the will, the power would be wanting to me; and that I may, to my eternal happiness, go to that place where Thy will and mine shall be one will, that is, heaven. Amen.

Resolution  
to have a  
better will.

*Another introduction for the third Sunday of Advent.*

**Text.**

*Tu quis es?*—John i. 19.

“Who art thou?”

**Introduction.**

Who art thou? Where art thou? How is it with thee now? What art thou thinking of? If I were to put these questions, etc. *Continues as above.*

**FORTY-FIRST SERMON.****ON THE PAIN OF SENSE IN HELL.****Subject.**

The pains of the body in hell will be general and at the same time unceasing.—*Preached on the third Sunday in Lent.*

**Text.**

*Erat ejiciens demonium.*—Luke xi. 14.

“He was casting out a devil.”

**Introduction.**

Worthy of pity is the man possessed by the devil! For we can see clearly enough from the frightful gestures and actions of possessed persons how cruelly the hellish foe treats, night and day, the bodies of those in whom he dwells. But still more unfortunate is the man who on the last day is condemned to the eternal flames of hell, and given over body and soul to be tormented by legions of demons. O torments of hell! I tremble when I think of you! O foolish mortals, who make deliberate choice of those torments! After having portrayed the pains that rack the soul and mind in hell and drive them to madness, I shall go on in this meditation to describe, in order to inspire sinners with a salutary fear, the torments that there torture the body and its senses.

**Plan of Discourse.**

*The pains of the body in hell are general, and at the same time unceasing. There you have the whole subject.*

O Mary, Mother of mercy, and you, holy guardian angels, obtain for us all the grace to descend into hell frequently in thought during life, that none of us may have to go there after death.

The pains  
and tor-  
ments of  
his life do

The crosses and trials, pains and torments that strew this vale of tears, no matter how great or numerous they may be, are yet so divided and controlled that they never all attack the same



subject at the same time. Thus he who is poor is not at the same time sick; he who is sick is not publicly ridiculed and laughed at; he who is sorrowful has not to suffer hunger and thirst; he who is persecuted and tormented by one man is not therefore made the object of general execration. A pain in the head or eye does not affect the hand or foot; lumeness in the feet does not cause the chest to suffer; the body may be ill at ease while the mind remains quite vigorous, and so forth. There is always some part in man that remains free from pain. And although a sick person sometimes imagines that he is suffering all over, it still remains true that the same pain which afflicts one member cannot be at the same time in all the others. If the patient is suffering from heat he cannot be affected by cold; if he has a disgust for food he cannot be affected by hunger; he cannot have to-day the same pain that tormented him yesterday.

But, my dear brethren, imagine a man who has to suffer all possible torments and pains in the highest degree in every member of his body inwardly and outwardly at the same time. Go into the hospitals and pest-houses in which there are hundreds of sick and wounded. Hear how the poor people sigh, and moan, and howl; one on account of pains in the head, another because he cannot bear the violent aching of ear, or eye, or tooth. The one burns with heat, the other shivers with cold; one is tortured by a perpetual pain in the side, another suffers from some gastric disease, a third from chest or heart, a fourth from gout in hands or feet, a fifth from pains in the limbs; others are affected with dropsy, phthisis, lung disease, jaundice, insomnia; others again can neither stand, nor walk, nor sit, nor lie down for pain. Look at the poor wounded; one has broken an arm, the other a leg, a third has a broken head, a fourth a wound in the body, a fifth has been shot through the shoulder, the sixth has his mouth and nose eaten away by cancer and mortification. The doctors stand round with their instruments in their hands; here they burn with hot irons, there they cut into the living flesh with sharp knives; in one case they cut off a hand, in another a foot from the body, etc. On all sides there is wailing and lamentation, and one can hardly witness such a spectacle without fainting. Go still farther in thought, and bring before your minds each and every one of those torments ever invented by cruel tyrants, who, through hatred and diabolical anger, wished to take vengeance on their enemies, or on the martyrs of Christ. See the terrible racks

not all afflict the same person at the same time.

If it were possible for one man to suffer all together, he would be looked on as the most miserable of men.

on which the body was stretched out, the gallows and wheels on which it was torn limb from limb, the rods and scourges that rent the flesh from the bones; the hooks to tear the body, the knives to flay it alive, after which it was covered with salt; the sharp nails and splinters that were thrust between the nails of hands and feet; the glowing coals; the pans in which living beings were roasted and baked slowly; the boiling lead and sulphur that was thrust down their mouths; the pitch and resin with which their bodies were covered and then set fire to, so that they looked like living torches. Imagine you witness the cruelty practised by the Huguenots in France against the Catholics; how they slowly disembowelled their victims, cut off their heads with blunt or even wooden saws, dragged them astride up and down a tightly-drawn rope until they were cut in two. Imagine their barbarity in binding a living man to a dead body, until the stench of the latter caused the man to die. Bring together these and all other horrible torments you can imagine, and heap them all together with every conceivable kind of sickness, wounds, martyrdom, and torments, and let one individual suffer them all at the same time. What is the result? Oh, truly you have then the most miserable wretch you can imagine, and he could not bear such torments for a moment without a miracle; for according to philosophers and naturalists, and experience confirms their words, every pain, when it reaches its greatest intensity, "must either finish or be finished;"<sup>1</sup> it must either cease or put an end to the patient.

Yet his misery is not to be compared to that of the lost soul, who must suffer far worse torments at one and the same time.

But suppose one were enabled by a miracle to endure such an accumulation of torments for twenty, fifty, or a hundred years, and remain alive during the time; would you not then, I ask, have a sketch of the state of the damned soul in hell? Not by any means; it would be a mere play or comedy in comparison. The reprobate would, so to speak, laugh at the idea of comparing those torments with what they have to endure in hell. "The worst sufferings one can have in this life," says St. Augustine, "are not only small, but actually nothing when contrasted with the torments of the damned."<sup>2</sup> Why? Because all the pains and torments in the world are but instruments, as we have seen already, set in motion by weak creatures; but in hell it is the almighty and angry, avenging God who measures out chastise-

<sup>1</sup> Aut finiet, aut finietur.

<sup>2</sup> Quæ quisque gravia patitur, in comparatione æterni ignis, non tantum parva, sed nulla sunt.—S. Aug. Sermon. 100. de temp.

ment to evil doers. And although men are punished here on earth according to divine decree, their pains are but drops of the divine anger that fall upon them: "The curse...is fallen upon us,"<sup>1</sup> says the Prophet Daniel. There in eternity there will be a full outpouring of the divine wrath: "I will heap evils upon them, and will spend my arrows among them,"<sup>2</sup> says the Lord. Here on earth the sorrowing David cries out: "Day and night Thy hand was heavy upon me."<sup>3</sup> "The hand of the Lord hath touched me,"<sup>4</sup> sighs forth the suffering Job from the dung-hill. But there in hell the damned may howl forth that not alone the hand, but the arm of the Almighty, the whole Godhead has fallen upon and oppressed them! For just as in heaven God when rewarding His servants employs, so to speak, all His perfections to make an infinite happiness of joys and delights for His dear friends and chosen children, so also the avenging God will assemble all His perfections to punish His enemies who despised Him with endless torments and unceasing misery and pain. He will punish them according to His infinite wisdom, His infinite justice, His infinite holiness, His omnipotence, His immensity, His majesty, His eternity, in a word, as Tertullian says, "according to the fulness of His divinity."<sup>5</sup> Therefore those torments cannot be merely natural, but are raised above natural power by God, and are incomprehensible to us mortals; and they are also general, so that there is not the smallest point in the body of the damned that will not have to suffer simultaneously all imaginable pains, as the Lord tells us by the Prophet Job: "Every sorrow shall fall upon him."<sup>6</sup>

O eyes of mine! if I should unhappily be condemned to hell for eternity, how will you fare? Now you are delighted with the beautiful light of the day, with the flowers, gardens, meadows, beautiful paintings, amusing plays; ah, what a change and what a terrible torment it will be for you when, according to the words of Our Lord, you shall be cast out into "the exterior darkness;"<sup>7</sup> into an eternal night, of which the Psalmist says: "He shall never see light!"<sup>8</sup> You will burn in the midst of flames, but in

The intolerable torment of the eyes.

<sup>1</sup> Stillavit...super nos maledictio.—Dan. ix. 11.

<sup>2</sup> Congregabo super eos mala, et sagittas meas complebo in eis.—Deut. xxxii. 23.

<sup>3</sup> Die ac nocte gravata est super me manus tua.—Ps. xxxi. 4.

<sup>4</sup> Manus Domini tetigit me.—Job xix. 21.

<sup>5</sup> Secundum plenitudinem divinitatis sue.

<sup>6</sup> Omnis dolor irruet super eum.—Job xx. 22.

<sup>7</sup> In tenebris exteriores.—Matt. viii. 12.

<sup>8</sup> Usque in aeternum non videbit lumen.—Ps. xlviii. 20.

a wonderful fire of sulphur that shall not give forth the least ray of light, for our infallible faith teaches us that hell is an eternal fire and at the same time exterior darkness. Now you often sully yourselves with lustful glances; you take pleasure in contemplating the beauty of others, in looking at impure objects, and in contemplation of vain apparel before the looking-glass; how fearful your punishment will be in hell, where you will behold nothing but shapes of deformity into which all the bodies of the damned shall be transformed, and hideous spectres with which the demons shall terrify you forever! How one shudders and grows cold with fear sometimes on entering alone a large room in which there is no light, if only a cat creeps from under the bed and he happens to see its glistening eyes. A shock of the kind would be enough to frighten a timid man to death. How terrible then must it not be to live in eternal night, surrounded by countless hellish phantoms and grizzly spectres that pass before you in all their deformity? Now the eyes are delighted in company, and glisten with laughter and fun, nor do we think of shedding tears of repentance in order to wash out our sins; alas! how that laughter shall be changed in that place of torments, in which, according to the words of Our Lord, there shall be nothing but weeping and gnashing of teeth: they "shall be cast out into the exterior darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth!"<sup>1</sup>

**Of the ears.** The same weeping and gnashing of teeth shall be a torment for the ears. An ill-tuned instrument is intolerable to a skilled musician; a crying child in a room, women quarrelling in a house, the howling of a dog in the street, is a torment to many a sensitive individual. Ah, may God save you and me from hell! How intolerable it must be for the ears to have to listen to that hellish and hideous music made by the shrieks and howlings and curses and blasphemies of so many millions of demons and lost souls, a music that shall last for eternity!

**Of the smell.** One of the worst pains of sense is a foul stench. You hold your nose if a dead dog or other carrion is lying in the street as you pass by. Sometimes when graves are opened a foul effluvia rises from them, strong enough to cause the death of any one who happens to be present. Revolting was the illness that carried off Lucius Sylla, the Roman tyrant, and Herod Ascalonita, the Jewish king; the bodies of both these men swarmed with

<sup>1</sup> *Ibi erit fletus et stridor dentium!*—Matt. viii. 12.

worms as if they were two ant-heaps, so that they rotted away while still alive, and the flesh fell from them in pieces, the stench meanwhile that proceeded from them being so insupportable that it was with the utmost difficulty and only by offering an exorbitant remuneration that any one could be found to wait on them. Yet their bodies were tender, princely, and royal. Wise and prudent is the law that forbids the interment of a body until twenty-four hours after death; the object of it is to prevent the recurrence of a sad misfortune that has happened more than once already, namely, the interment of a living body. Now let each one imagine that he is the victim of an accident like that which befell a noble lady of Rhodes, according to the account given by Father Engelgrave. She fell suddenly into a trance, and lay there as if dead, not giving the least sign of life, and was without delay thrown into a hole with other dead bodies, uncoffined (as is the custom in some countries, especially in Italy), and buried. She awoke out of the trance and came to her senses, and we may easily imagine what her feelings were when she became aware of the insufferable stench that arose from so many decaying bodies and rotten bones. To my mind she must have wished to die then and there. Therefore it is looked on as one of the greatest cruelties of the tyrant Maxentius that he caused a living man to be bound to a decaying corpse, until the fetid exhalations from it put an end to him. Ah, delicate worldlings! may God save you from hell! You cannot bear the smell of a smoking lamp; what will you do in that abyss in which, for all eternity, you will not have a breath of fresh air? into which, according to St. Thomas of Aquin, all the filth of the earth flows as to its common centre? What will you do in that lake of sulphur in which the bodies of the reprobate shall seethe and boil, each one of them emitting such a fearful odor that, as St. Bernard says, it would be enough to fill the whole world with pestilence? "Out of their carcasses shall rise a stench,"<sup>1</sup> says the Lord by the Prophet Isaias. The devil appeared once to St. Martin, clothed in purple, with a precious crown on his head, and said to him: I am Christ; adore me! Oh, no! replied the holy man; my Lord Jesus Christ is crowned with thorns and clothed with blood. I do not recognize my humble Saviour in the magnificent dress that you wear. These words filled the evil spirit with confusion, and he disappeared, leaving behind him such a

<sup>1</sup> De cadaveribus eorum ascendet fœtor.—Is. xxxiv. 3.

stench as could only arise from a foul demon. Now, if one wicked spirit can assail with so horrible a stench even a holy servant of God, over whom he has no power, what will be the effect of so many millions of demons amongst the reprobate enemies of God, who are altogether delivered over to their fury, and whom they torture with all their might? If the foul odor of one of the reprobate is enough to cause a pestilence over the whole world, terrible indeed must it be to lie forever among millions of bodies packed together like herrings in a barrel! Such is the home that delicate voluptuaries prepare for themselves by gratifying their sinful passions here on earth!

Of the taste  
by hunger.

And what am I to think of the pain of taste? Hunger and thirst cause such agony that, as the history of this city of Treves testifies, mothers have been known, when urged by the frenzy of famine, to eat their own children. Oh, may God save you all from hell! you voluptuaries, whose god is your belly, who cannot abstain from meat according to the law of the Church even during the forty days of Lent, who swear at the cook for oversalting the soup, who before saying a word of prayer in the morning must gratify the palate with food and drink! Wo to you! How are you to fare in hell? Hear what infallible Truth says: "They... shall suffer hunger like dogs;"<sup>1</sup> toads and adders shall be their food, not to satisfy their hunger, but to torture them all the more. We read of some zealous servants of God who, to mortify themselves, used to suck the matter from the ulcers of the sick poor; but what is that in comparison with the food of the reprobate in hell? The saints acted thus once or twice in their lives; they did it out of a burning, supernatural love of God, which made every burden light, and every bitterness sweet; yet what they did is looked on as an heroic act of mortification, it is chronicled in books, preached about from the pulpit, and eagerly listened to by an attentive audience; but we are afraid to follow the example of those heroes, and to practise a similar mortification; nay, there are some who would die of disgust if they attempted such a thing. O ye delicate, overfed gluttons! you will have to swallow filth of that kind, and still worse, not merely once, but many thousand times, nay, for eternity; not voluntarily, but perforce; not out of a sweet, meritorious love of God, but with a despairing hatred of Him. And then you can groan forth: "The things which before my soul would not touch now, through an-

<sup>1</sup> Famem patientur ut canes.—Ps. lvi. 7.

guish, are my meats.”<sup>1</sup> Picture to yourselves the sufferings of those sick people who are not allowed by the doctors to eat anything, unless a very small quantity of food that is measured out to them by the ounce, and very sparingly; their enforced fast makes them feel the pangs of hunger very keenly, yet they are not permitted to take food. Imagine what occurs in a calm at sea, when ship and sailors are kept in the one place and cannot make any progress; what provisions they have on board must be managed very carefully, and served out so as merely to preserve life, not to still hunger. Imagine the state of things in those unfruitful seasons and in the scarcity that followed, when not only the poor and needy, but even the rich and wealthy were forced to go out like herds of cattle and crawl on the earth, devouring every blade of grass they could find; while a pound of pigeon’s dung was sold at a high price as a delicate morsel. We read in the Fourth Book of Kings that all this occurred in the city of Samaria. Yet in spite of the famine and scarcity some kind of food was found to preserve life; but in hell not the least refreshment can be hoped for. The hard, stale crumbs of black oaten and rye bread that are usually thrown to the dogs would seem a most delicate food to the damned; but they shall never have even that much.

This terrible hunger shall be accompanied by a burning thirst By thirst. that shall last forever. Ah, the damned shall cry out, hear, all ye fountains, brooks, torrents, lakes, seas, even ye morasses and muddy pools, give us only one or two drops of all the waters that flow by unused and unclaimed! But the answer shall come from the hellish tormentors, the evil spirits: yes! we shall bring you a cooling drink at once! molten lead and brass, the gall of serpents, the poison of dragons! “Their wine is the gall of dragons, and the venom of asps which is incurable.”<sup>2</sup> Come, luxurious gluttons and voluptuaries, this is the table to which you are invited, this the drink prepared for you! You may have heard people bad with fever crying out, for the love of God, and the Blessed Virgin, and all the saints, for some one to give them a drink of water, and after having got it complaining of thirst just as loudly as before: Oh, what a terrible thirst I am suffering! Is there anything like it? And while the water is being brought to them they look at it eagerly, and so to speak, drink it up with

<sup>1</sup> Quæ prius nolebat tangere anima mea, nunc præ angustia cibi mei sunt.—Job vi. 7.

<sup>2</sup> Fel draconum vinum eorum, et venenum aspidum insanabile.—Deut. xxxii. 33.

their eyes before it touches their lips. Do you think, perhaps, that such a thirst is the worst and most difficult to bear? Not by any means! Far worse is that endured by poor sailors under the burning sun in the torrid zone; for from above they are dried up by the burning rays of the sun, and from below the heated water throws back those rays and consumes them with heat to such an extent that they eagerly drink even tepid, foul water, swarming with worms. Severe was the thirst suffered by the inhabitants of Bethulia, when that town was besieged by Holofernes, who cut off all the water supply, so that many of the people died of thirst, as we read in the Book of Judith. Terrible indeed must have been the thirst suffered by that merchant travelling in Africa, of whom Johannes Leo writes in his description of that country; for he paid twenty thousand gold pieces for a drink of dirty water; and still worse was the thirst of Lysimachus, who bartered his crown for a glass of water. Nor is he to be accused of folly on that account, for if he had acted otherwise, he would have lost his life as well as his crown and kingdom. Now put together all the thirst, dryness, heat, and fever ever suffered by the sick; add to it the thirst of the inhabitants of Bethulia, of the Israelites in the desert, of sailors on the sea, of travellers in Africa; and all will be as nothing compared to the fearful thirst felt by even one of the reprobate in hell. Not a whole ocean of the sweetest water would suffice to quench such a thirst; an inundation of the whole world, a deluge would be far too small for the purpose. And meanwhile the damned have not even one drop of water to cool their tongues, and no other refreshment is given them but the gall of dragons and the poison of asps: "Their wine is the gall of dragons, and the venom of asps which is incurable."

Of the  
touch.

Finally with regard to the pain of touch, which is situated in all the senses and members of the whole body, suffice it to say that the damned live in everlasting fire, which rages both inside and outside them always. There is fire in the skin, in the flesh, in the eyes, in the ears, in the throat, in the hands and feet, in the nerves, in the marrow of the bones, in the whole body, so that it is like a glowing iron in the fire; and as we have seen already, that fire is raised miraculously above its nature, so that it tortures, not merely according to the properties of fire, but at the same time inflicts on the body all kinds of pains and torments. "In the fire alone," says St. Jerome, "they feel every kind of



torture.”<sup>1</sup> Oh, what unspeakable agony! What cries and howlings! What rage and madness! What raving and despair!

And what is most terrible in those hellish agonies: they are not only general, but also incessant, uninterrupted, continual. The pains that one has to endure in this life have two properties that make them tolerable; they are either slight and trivial, and then they are easily borne, or else they are very violent, and their intensity in a short time makes weakened nature insensible to them, as we find to be the case with the sick who when near death feel no more pain. And no matter how long a pain lasts, it is not always equally violent; it is interrupted or lessened occasionally. But in hell it is quite different; “the damned soul,” says Rupert, “will be tortured without hope of rest;”<sup>2</sup> for every moment of eternity it will suffer every imaginable kind of torment, without even a moment’s interruption. Father Abraham, cried out the rich glutton from hell, I have but one favor to ask of you. I am suffering terrible tortures in these flames; give me one drop of water, only as much as you can take up on the tip of your finger! Only one drop, so that at least while it is falling on my tongue I may feel a momentary alleviation! So will the lost soul cry out after a thousand, a thousand million, a thousand times a thousand million of years; but not even that much refreshment will be given to it for all eternity. For all eternity without interruption the eyes shall be tormented by darkness and hideous spectres, the ears by howlings and curses, the smell by an intolerable stench, the taste by fearful hunger and thirst, the feeling by the fire in which the whole body is immersed; “the damned soul shall be tortured without hope of rest” forever and ever.

All those pains shall be incessant and uninterrupted.

Ah, my God, how terrible is Thy just anger! O hell! O treasury of pains and torments, how fearful thou art! O unhappy people who are condemned to hell! O eternal hell! is it possible that thou art the place in which they are buried who die in mortal sin? Yes; that is an article of faith, and sinners are well aware of it, and believe it. And are there still sinners in the world? Alas! yes, and in countless numbers! And do they all wish to go to hell? Yes; for they are certain that the lives they lead will bring them thither. Such is the belief, such are the lives even of those who hate nothing so much as

Folly of sinners in deliberately choosing hell.

<sup>1</sup> In uno igne omnia tormenta sentiunt.

<sup>2</sup> Sine requiectionis spe tribulabitur.

trouble and discomfort; who wish and desire nothing but an easy, comfortable, sensual, pleasant life; who place their happiness in the gratification of the eyes, ears, and tongue, in the pleasures of taste, smell, and touch; who tremble and shudder when one speaks to them of mortification of the senses, of self-denial, of penitential exercises that do no hurt to the body; who, that they may devote themselves all the more freely to the gratification of their senses, laugh at the word of God, the Gospel truths, the warnings and menaces of the faith, God Himself. Good God! are those people going to hell to suffer for all eternity those terrible, general, unceasing pains and torments of that inextinguishable fire? Yes; they must make up their minds to that, for such is their belief; such must be the end of the lives they are leading. And why do they wish to go to hell? For the sake of that momentary, carnal pleasure in which they now take delight; for some temporal gain; for the love of a mortal creature; to gratify a passion; to be in harmony with the perverse world. And do they damn themselves for such trifles? Do they lose all for such worthless things? Do they choose hell, that terrible abyss of torments, for such a short-lived gain? Have those people completely lost their reason?

And yet hell  
shall be  
filled with  
those fools!

Ah, what am I saying! Have not I myself often been such a foolish, senseless creature, when I committed mortal sin for the sake of such wretched things, and thereby made deliberate choice of hell-fire? Alas! what have I done? What is to become of me? "I am filled with fear and trembling," exclaims St. Bernard, "and all my bones are shaken at the thought of that unhappy country of the damned."<sup>1</sup> My hair stands on end, the blood stops still in my veins with fear and terror when I think of hell! O innocent Bernard! be still, and let me rather say those words and tremble with fear. If I descend in spirit into hell, I find there souls that committed the same sins that I have been guilty of, many who have committed far less sin than I; many, and indeed many millions of angels who have sinned but once by a momentary thought. Oh, wo to me then! for I have often deserved hell-fire by thought, word, and deed. Daily is this hell filled with souls, as the word of God assures us by the Prophet Isaias: "Therefore hath hell enlarged her soul, and opened her mouth without any bounds,"<sup>2</sup> in order to swallow down souls.

<sup>1</sup> Totus tremo atque horreo; ad memoriam istius regionis concussa sunt omnia ossa mea.

<sup>2</sup> Dilatavit infernus animam suam, et aperuit os suum absque ullo termino.—Is. v. 14.

Father Paul Segneri speaks of a certain chancellor in Paris who appeared after death to the then archbishop, and said to him that he was lost forever on account of pride and impurity; he then asked the archbishop what time had elapsed since his death. It is now thirty days, replied the archbishop, since you died. Only thirty days! said the other with a fearful howl. Only thirty days! Oh, wo to us wretches! We thought the last day must be close at hand, and that there could hardly be any one alive on earth any longer, "for as the snow falls from the sky, so do souls rush in crowds into hell."<sup>1</sup> Oh, wo! wo! wo! should I and all sinners cry out, what is to become of me? Shall I too be condemned to hell? Yes; I must either repent or burn;<sup>2</sup> I must either do penance for my sins or else burn forever in hell with the reprobate. I have sinned, and if I do not repent, hell shall be my everlasting dwelling-place.

But since the choice is left to me, I will select that which is easier. I can and will not burn forever in hell; therefore I will do penance and begin at once, for my time may be short, and death might hurry me into hell. But I shall not wait for that. Merciful God! be good to me, a poor sinner; here I am a criminal who have long ago deserved to be in that place of torment; avenge Thyself on me according to Thy will, but let Thy vengeance be inflicted on me in a fatherly manner during my life; punish me, chastise me; I have merited it on account of the sins that I now detest with a repentant heart above every other evil. I will acknowledge them in their minutest details in confession; I will be sorry for them to the hour of my death, and from this moment I will lead a different life, a life of penance, that by a timely amendment and contrition I may avoid the terrible, eternal pains of hell.

Arm my memory, O Lord! with a constant recollection of hell, that I may be strengthened against all temptations and not offend Thee again during my whole life by any sin! Concupiscence of the flesh! allurements of creatures! I will consume you with the thought of hell! If you offer me violence again, I will say to myself: what! shall I choose hell for the sake of a momentary pleasure? God forbid that I should purchase such a short-lived joy at such a dear price, and burn in everlasting fire! Concupiscence of the eyes, wealth, and goods of this world!

Detestation  
of past sins.

Resolution  
to arm our-  
selves by the  
thought of  
hell against  
all tempta-  
tion, and to  
serve God  
constantly.

<sup>1</sup> Sic ut enim nix ruit de coelo, ita animæ confertim ruunt in infernum.

<sup>2</sup> Aut poenitendum, aut ardens.

## 48    *On the Company of the Reprobate in Hell.*

I will burn you with the thought of hell! If you should again try to allure me to act unjustly, I will say to myself: what! shall I choose hell for the sake of a handful of earth? God forbid that I should burn forever for such a miserable gain! Pride of life, vanity of the world, favor and esteem of men! I will burn you with the thought of hell! If you try again to mislead me into doing or omitting anything against the Christian law by your criticisms and ridicule, by your flattery and promises, by your threats and persecutions, I will say to myself: what! shall I choose hell for the sake of human respect, for the love of the world? God forbid! Let others do as they please; I will not go to eternal torments for the sake of being like them. Crosses and trials of this life, whatever may be your name (and send me as many of them, O good God! as Thou knowest I can bear), I will sweeten you with the thought of hell. If you should try to move me to murmur against the will of God, I will say to myself: what! these are not the eternal pains of hell that I have so often and so richly deserved. Hell shall be to me a spur to preserve me from sloth and tepidity in the service of God, and to urge me on to the constant practice of the Christian virtues, and to mortify and restrain my senses. If any difficulty should try to come in my way, I will say to myself: what! am I to shirk any labor when there is question of escaping an eternal hell? No! there must be no rest until I can say to myself at the end of my short life: now I am sure of escaping the danger of hell and of entering into eternal joys! Strengthen, O Lord! by Thy powerful grace this resolution of mine. Amen.

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### *FORTY-SECOND SERMON.*

#### **ON THE COMPANY OF THE REPROBATE IN HELL.**

##### **Subject.**

The company of the reprobate is a terrible hell in itself.—  
*Preached on the fourth Sunday in Lent.*

##### **Text.**

*Sequebatur eum multitudo magna.*—John vi. 2.  
“A great multitude followed Him.”

Introduction.

These good people who followed Our Lord, although they were hungry and had nothing to eat, were still full of courage and consolation, partly because they had with them the Son of God, whose society can easily sweeten every bitterness; partly because there was a great crowd together who were in the same necessity. For it is an old saying and one that experience proves true: "It is consoling to have a companion in suffering."<sup>1</sup> And it is to this fact that the wicked generally appeal when they are threatened with hell, the intolerable pains of which we have been considering up to this. Oh, they say, as a poor sinner once said to me before his conversion: even if I am lost and have to go to hell, I shall not be the only one; I shall have plenty of companions, and amongst them the greatest and noblest. It must be a pleasant company after all. Ah, what reckless talk! May God keep you and me, my dear brethren, out of that company! If there were not in hell that terrible fire that tortures both soul and body, if there were no gnawing worm of conscience to afflict the damned with the recollection of the happiness they have forfeited, if there were no darkness, nor howling and cursing, nor stench, nor hunger and thirst, if there were no other pain in hell, the company alone that the damned find there would, to my mind, make a hell in itself, as I now proceed to show.

Plan of Discourse.

*The company of the reprobate is a terrible hell in itself; let us then be on our guard against it. Such is the whole subject.*

O God of mercy! move sinners to true repentance by Thy powerful grace, and all others to avoid sin and the occasions of sin, that none of those who are here present may experience what it is to have to live in the society of the damned. This we ask of Thee through the intercession of Mary and of our holy guardian angels.

That there is comfort here on earth in having a companion when one is ailing is true enough, provided the companion is a sympathetic one. But in hell things are quite different. If, I repeat, there were no other torment there except having to live in the society of the damned, that alone would make an intolerable hell for souls. For reflect a moment on what occurs here

Unpleasant  
company  
causes  
much dis-  
gust here on  
earth.

<sup>1</sup> Dulce est habere socium in poena.

on earth. Many a one has all his pleasure spoiled, even in the most agreeable society, if one happens to be present against whom he has a grudge, especially if the two enemies, who cannot bear the sight of each other, happen to sit together. Oh, then the best meats lose their savor, the choicest drinks become insipid; every word uttered by the one is a thorn in the side of the other; the hours seem lengthened into years by the efforts at enforced courtesy that have to be made to keep up appearances. And yet either, if he chose, might get up and go away.

As experience shows in unhappy marriages.

What torment it must then be for two or more who are at enmity to have to live together, as is often the case in unhappy marriages! Infallible is the truth spoken by the Holy Ghost: "It is better to dwell in a wilderness than with a quarrelsome and passionate woman."<sup>1</sup> And there is not a doubt of it. I often think with heartfelt pity of the poor man who is tied to such a disagreeable partner; he hears nothing at home but nagging and complaining, scolding and abuse; so that he is forced to go out of the house to get a little quiet, nor does he come home except with the greatest reluctance and counting the hours till it is time for him to go out again. And still greater is the pity I feel for the poor wife who, good and innocent as she is, must live with a husband who is addicted to drink, or what is worse, is unfaithful to her, and ill-treats and beats her as if she were a servant or a dog. Deserving indeed of pity is the poor woman, who when she hears her drunken husband knocking at the door, trembles in every limb, and has to make up her mind, as she knows by sad experience, to be dragged along by the hair, or kicked, or beaten. Unhappy companions, I think with deep sympathy, when husband and wife regard each other with mutual hatred and aversion; when both drink to excess and curse and abuse each other, and fight and tear each other by the hair; while the children and servants follow the example of their parents and superiors in cursing, and abusing, and fighting; and yet all have to live together. Truly that is a great cross!

The torment thus caused shown by a simile.

In ancient times the laws ordained that parricides should be tied up in a leathern sack with a living serpent, a cock, and an ape, and be thrown into the sea, in order that when those animals, that are natural foes to each other, should begin to fight the criminal might be torn to pieces between them. That is a

<sup>1</sup> Melius est habitare in terra deserta, quam cum muliere rixosa et iracunda.—Prov. xxi. 19.

picture of the unhappy household I have been describing: with this difference, however, that the murderer soon loses his life along with his companions, while the others have to drag along a painful existence in mutual hatred, quarreling, cursing, and fighting. For my part I should prefer to die rather than to live constantly in such a house and witness those disorderly scenes, not to speak of taking part in them. It is an old saying that there is hell in the house of two married people who hate each other.

But, my dear brethren, is it really a hell after all? Oh, no! quite different is the society that the divine justice has, as it were, sewed up in a sack in order to punish His enemies for eternity. According to the testimony of God Himself by the Prophet Job, it is a land "where...no order, but everlasting horror dwelleth."<sup>1</sup> Just as in heaven the blessed, united by an eternal and perfect love of God, rejoice in each other's happiness, and thus receive an accidental and continual joy from the happy company in which they are, so on the contrary in hell, the dwelling of disorder and confusion, the damned shall regard each other with hatred and aversion, and thus add to the torments they have to suffer. "As a bundle of thorns they shall be burnt with fire;"<sup>2</sup> such are the words of the Prophet Isaias. Mark this: like sharp thorns they shall pierce each other, and rend each other like mad dogs: "Every one shall eat the flesh of his own arm:" (that is, as commentators say, children, brethren, and nearfriends) "Manasses, Ephraim, and Ephraim Manasses."<sup>3</sup> Now if it is reckoned as a hell for two married people to live together in strife and hatred, what must that hell be where there are millions of damned together, who regard each other with the utmost rage and hatred, where the presence of the one is intolerable to the other, and yet they have no hope of being separated for all eternity, but must live together, packed like herrings in a barrel, amidst incessant cursing and imprecations, tearing, biting, and rending each other in their fury?

But, we might ask, shall not those boon companions, those jovial souls who spent the time so pleasantly together on earth, shall not they find some alleviation of their misery in being together in hell? And they who were inflamed during life with

Far greater shall be the torment caused in hell by the society of the damned.

Even those who are on the best terms here shall then hate each

<sup>1</sup> Ubi nullus ordo, sed sempiternus horror inhabitat.—Job x. 22.

<sup>2</sup> Spinae congregatae igni comburentur.—Is. xxxiii. 12.

<sup>3</sup> Unusquisque carnem brachii sui vorabit: Manasses, Ephraim, et Ephraim Manasses.—Is. ix. 20.

other for-  
ever.

an impure passion so that they could hardly bear to be separated for one hour, and were ready to share all they had, nay, to give up their very lives for each other, shall they have no consolation or pleasure in being together in hell, in seeing that their torments are shared between them? For we know that people of that kind are wont to comfort each other in sorrow, and thus to lessen considerably the weight of the blow. Shall it not be so, I ask, in hell? Ah, nothing of the kind! All this intimacy and friendship, this love and confidence, shall disappear amongst the damned, or to speak more correctly, this former love and confidence, intimacy and friendship, shall rather increase their mutual hatred and aversion, their madness and despair, their curses and imprecations. For it is but right that they who in any way have been instruments and co-operators during life in tasting the forbidden pleasure and offending an infinite God, should also in hell be instruments and co-operators in torturing each other and satisfying the just anger of God.

Especially  
they who  
lived to-  
gether in  
impure  
love.

Mark this well, O impure man and woman! who now receive so many fatherly warnings and exhortations in sermons and in the confessional, to leave the proximate occasion of sin, to give up the unlawful intimacy, to turn out of the house the person who has captivated you with impure passion (for until you have done this you cannot receive absolution, even if you told your sins to the Pope himself and he pronounced the form of absolution over you), and each time think or say: I cannot abandon that person; my love is too great; I cannot, even if I saw hell opened before me. Nay, so far do you go in your madness sometimes, that you do not hesitate to say or think: I do not care about hell; I should rather be damned (what a thing for pious ears to listen to!) if I was sure of having that person in hell with me. Ah, senseless creature! I sincerely wish that this foolish desire of yours may never be fulfilled! But if it should happen to your eternal misfortune that you are condemned to hell with the object of your sinful love—and that will certainly be the case if you continue in your present mode of life without doing penance for the abominable sins you are committing,—then I tell you, and you may be quite sure of what I say, that there will be no demon in hell for whom you will have more hatred and fear, no demon who will torture and afflict you so cruelly as the person whom you now love in such a senseless and brutish manner. The beautiful countenance that you now call



angelic will become so hideous and deformed in that place of torments that the most revolting of the demons, Lucifer himself, will appear to you fair and comely beside it. The eyes that you now so foolishly liken to the stars in the sky will then shoot forth flashes of lightning to fill you with anguish and dread. Those comely locks that now captivate your eyes shall then be changed into writhing serpents to bite and gnaw at you for all eternity. The mouth that now is full of endearing expressions, and lends itself so easily to your caresses, will then vomit forth curses and imprecations on you.

Accursed seducer, it will cry out; do I see you here? You have brought me to the abyss of hell! I have satisfied your brutish passion through love of money, or the hope of marriage, or human respect, or poverty, or mere sensuality. Accursed wretch! now I will revenge myself on you for all eternity! And you in turn will exclaim: wanton woman! you are the cause of my damnation; it is you alone I have to thank for being in hell; your indecency in dress, the unchaste songs you sang, the letters you wrote, your flatteries and caresses, your efforts to please me brought me down to the depths of vice, and from there into hell! For all eternity I shall give you no rest; you shall be the object of my undying rage and hatred. In a word, the very presence of the person whom you now find so hard to leave will then be to you a hell in itself. A certain prince who was taken prisoner in battle, seeing his captor standing before him, cried out with averted countenance: take away that man out of my sight, or else have pity on me and strike me dead! Unhappy sinner! how many thousand times you will wish to die in hell; or since death will then be an impossibility for you, what a great alleviation you would think it to have that person removed from your sight whom you now call your treasure and the idol of your heart! But all in vain: you will be able to curse and revile that hellish fury, but her society you will never be freed from for all eternity.

But, we might think and ask, how will it be then with those who lived together on earth in lawful, honorable, dutiful love, such as should exist between man and wife, father and son, mother and daughter, brothers and sisters, friends and relations? Will not these, at least if they are together in hell, console each other somewhat in their misfortunes by mutual sympathy? No, dear Christians; in that place where, according to the words of God Himself, there is no order nor reason, but eternal confusion,

They shall  
curse each  
other for-  
ever.

So, too,  
shall hus-  
bands and  
wives.

all friendship and relationship, all love and sympathy shall lose their names and be changed into bitter anger and hatred, especially if one of the formerly beloved persons was the occasion of sin to the other. Accursed wife, the husband will cry out in rage and hatred, must I have you always at my side to increase my torments? Would that I had never seen you, for then I should not perhaps be here; for your sake I often forgot my duty to God and my own conscience; to save you trouble or to retain your affection I have often done what I knew to be unlawful; to maintain you in idleness, frivolity, wasting your time paying and receiving visits, gambling, and amusing yourself, extravagance in dress, I have had recourse to unlawful means to make money, and have been obliged to withhold from Jesus Christ, in the persons of the poor and needy, what belonged to Him by right. Accursed wife, another will cry out, your obstinacy and disobedience, your spirit of contradiction, your bad temper, your fondness for company, your freedom of manner with others whom you cared for more than for me, have been the occasion of the many sins that I committed against my marriage vows; and now you have brought me into this place of torments! And you, accursed husband, the wife will exclaim, you are the cause of my eternal damnation because you allowed me too much liberty, or encouraged me to lead a vain, unchristian life; for your sake I have neglected many acts of devotion, many a confession and Communion, lost many a sermon, and indulged our children in all kinds of vanities and pleasures; the drunken and debauched habits that led you so often into leaving me alone at home with the children, the cruelty with which you acted towards me as if I were your servant or your dog, drove me to sadness and despair, and to many sins that sprang therefrom, and finally into this abyss of hell!

**Parents and children.**

Accursed son, a father will say, it is on your account that I am damned, for I often sacrificed my conscience in my anxiety to provide for your future; frequently had I made the resolution of restoring ill-gotten goods to their lawful owners, as I was bound to do by the divine law, but my inordinate love for you deterred me each time; I was so desirous of leaving you something at my death that I kept what I had no right to, and am now in hell. Accursed father, the son will reply, you rather are the cause of my ruin; if you had kept me under better restraint, and led me in my youth to fear God, and kept me away

from sin and dangerous occasions; if you had taken more care of my spiritual and less of my temporal needs; if you had not prevented me from following my religious vocation, I should now be in heaven, and should have escaped the eternal torments which are caused me by your hateful presence in hell! Accursed daughter, a mother will say, my foolish love for you has been my ruin; I allowed you to spend your time in idleness, vanity, and worldliness, and did not chastise you for your bad and scandalous conduct! Truly, accursed mother, the daughter will reply, you should have kept me in check; it was your duty as a mother; if you had been attentive to it I should not now be lying in hell. The bad example you gave me, the dangerous company into which you brought me, the pride you inspired me with, the vanity in dress that you encouraged or permitted in me by your silence, has brought me to eternal ruin, to everlasting fire! Cruel mother! did you bring me into the world that you might have a hellish fury to be your companion here, and that one of us might eternally torture the other? Accursed the day and the hour in which you gave me birth! Such is the manner in which brothers and sisters, friends and relations will rage and storm at each other.

O ye demons! you are not needed in hell, since the wicked themselves will thus torture each other unceasingly! It is true; still those evil spirits will also enter into that dreadful company, not merely as hateful and odious enemies, but also as cruel executioners of the divine justice, and they will strain every nerve to heap torments on the damned. For this their terrible appearance should alone suffice, for they are so hideous that the seraphic St. Francis, to whom a demon once showed himself in visible shape, acknowledged to his companion Ægidius, that if God had not miraculously preserved his life, the mere sight of such a hellish monster for one moment would have been enough to deprive him of life through fear and terror. St. Antoninus writes of a priest who once saw a devil, and who said that he would rather leap into a flaming furnace than look at that evil spirit or one like him again. St. Catharine of Siena in her dialogue with Our Lord offered to walk on burning coals till the day of judgment rather than look at a devil again. Now, I ask, if one demon seems so terrible to a mortal who merely looks at him, what must it be in hell where there are so many millions of evil spirits who not only terrify the damned by their appearance,

How terrible the company of the demons must be!

but also add to their torments by their laughter and sneering, and by the tortures they inflict on them?

Thus the company of the damned must be itself an intolerable hell.

Hell, what a sad and dismal dwelling-place thou art! How terrible to have to live forever amidst all imaginable torments, in the society of countless companions filled with undying hatred for and torturing each other unceasingly! The Catholic Church permits married people who have a great aversion for each other to be separated as far as living together is concerned, although the marriage-tie can never be dissolved; and she does so through a compassionate desire of saving them from the heavy cross they would have to carry in being in each other's company. Oh, if the damned had that consolation, and could separate themselves from their hated companions, and hide away in some crevice of the earth to suffer their hellish pains by themselves, they would be freed from one of their worst and most bitter punishments! But any wish or hope of that kind would be utterly vain for them. "The wicked shall see, and shall be angry," such are the words of the Prophet David; "he shall gnash with his teeth and pine away." For all eternity he shall behold his hated companions, and gnash his teeth against them with rage and despair, and be filled with unconquerable loathing for them; but all his desires to be freed from them shall be unavailing, for "the desire of the wicked shall perish."<sup>1</sup>

How foolish to comfort one's self with the thought of the company to be met with in hell!

Where are you now, O sinners! with your former reasoning? Oh, you say, what does it matter if I do go to hell? I shall find plenty of comrades there, and amongst them the richest and noblest of the world to bear me company. O foolish and unhappy people! Do you talk and mock in that style when during your life-time a public calamity scourges the city or country? when, for instance, a fire breaks out and consumes a whole street, and your own house is burnt with the rest? Then every one of you would run out at once and leave everything for the sake of saving dear life, regardless of the poverty and distress that must ensue from the loss of property. When the ship, overwhelmed by the raging waves, begins to sink, every one does his best to save his life by swimming to land. When in war-time the hostile army is engaged in plundering and devastating a country, the inhabitants do what they can to save their own effects. Now in such circumstances why do not people say

<sup>1</sup> Peccator videbit et irascetur, dentibus suis fremet et tabescet, desiderium peccatorum peribit.—Ps. cxi. 10.

or think: what is it to me? Even if I do lose my life by fire, I shall not be the only one; I shall have many companions in misfortune. If I am drowned, all the others who are in the ship with me shall share in my fate. If the soldiers plunder me, many others shall be brought to ruin with me. Why, I ask, do not people try to console themselves in that manner under the circumstances? Because the consolation is then utterly inadequate. It is only when there is question of the eternal ruin of the immortal soul, of the eternal loss of the joys of heaven, of an eternal fire with the demons in hell, that men can laugh, and joke, and comfort themselves with the thought of the companions who are to share in their damnation, and who must suffer the same loss, the same ruin, the same eternal pains. Then they can say: I am not the only one. Truly, O wicked man! you are not the only one who shall burn forever in hell; you have entered on the broad way to your destruction, of which Our Lord speaks in the Gospel of St. Matthew: "Wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there are who go in thereat."<sup>1</sup> Truly, sinner, you shall not be alone in hell; for many, very many, nay, the majority of men shall be there with you; if you were there alone there might still be some consolation for you; but as it is, the society of so many shall be, as we have seen already, a new and an intolerable hell for you, and it shall be all the more painful as the number of your companions is greater. According to the teaching of St. Thomas, the multitude of the damned increases the pain of each one of them.<sup>2</sup>

You should reflect on this, O sinner! who are now in the proximate occasion of sin, so that the fear of being condemned to that unhappy company may urge you to give up that sinful intimacy. You should reflect on this, O seducer of souls! who by unchaste songs and conversation, or impure books, or diabolical teaching, or vain and scandalous dress, or by giving bad example, are in any way the means of leading the innocent astray, and are thus actually adding to the number of the reprobate to your own greater future torment. Reflect on this, you who now are so fond of dancing, debauchery, drunkenness, and gambling. If the only mischief done on those occasions were the loss of the

Exhortation  
often to  
think on  
this.

<sup>1</sup> *Lata porta et spatiosa via est, quæ ducit ad perditionem, et multi sunt qui intrant per eam.*—Matt. vii. 13.

<sup>2</sup> *Ex damnatorum multitudine poena singulorum augetur.*—D. Thom. in 4. dist. 50. Q. 2. A. 1.

precious time that God has granted men for their salvation, it would be bad enough and quite unworthy of a Christian. Reflect on this, O parents! when you take with you or allow your sons and daughters to go into dangerous society; when you send your young daughters into foreign countries that they may learn to know the world, away from under your eyes, and to be able to live like others. Truly, they learn to know the world all too soon in that manner; for, generally speaking, as experience teaches, they come back vain worldlings, who have learned nothing but to live and dress according to the corrupt and perverse fashions of the world, to show themselves off before others, and to lose their time in idleness and walking about the streets. O unhappy father who has such children! O miserable mother who has nursed them! O unhappy marriage whose fruit is even one child that must burn forever in hell, in the society of the reprobate! Last of all, reflect on this, you married people who have lost your mutual love for each other, and have thus embittered your lives! Reflect on this, all of you who have to live or deal with any persons to whom you have an aversion; think, I say, in order to preserve yourselves in Christian meekness and humility, and to turn to the good of your souls the annoyances you experience from such persons: ah, why should I trouble myself about these people? They are not by any means as bad as the society of the damned in hell. May God keep you and me from that terrible fate, that we may never know by experience what a fearful torment, what an intolerable hell is the company of the reprobate!

Prayer to  
the saints to  
obtain for  
us grace  
that we may  
avoid that  
company.

And you, O saints! chosen children of God, who are now beyond all danger of sinning, and are enjoying the happy company of each other, and of Jesus and Mary, in the kingdom of heaven, oh, think of us, poor, miserable sinners, who still wander about in this vale of tears in countless dangers and occasions of being lost forever! Pray for us to the God whom you love so much, and whom you behold face to face, that we may all repent sincerely of our sins, carefully avoid all dangerous occasions in future, and serve our God constantly to the end, that not one of us may be banished to that accursed company in hell, but that as we are now assembled in this church, so we may all one day meet in your society, and rejoice forever in heaven. Amen.

*Pain Caused the Damned by Thoughts of Heaven.* 59

*Another introduction to the same sermon for the third Sunday after Epiphany.*

**Text.**

*Filii autem regni ejicientur in tenebras exteriores.*—Matt. viii. 12.

“But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into the exterior darkness.”

**Introduction.**

Exterior darkness, in which weeping and gnashing of teeth shall be the eternal refrain! Hell! what a terrible place thou art! And who are to be cast forth? The children of the kingdom; that is, many of those who, in preference to others, were called to the light of the true faith, and were richly equipped with the means of gaining heaven, if they had only wished to use them; these shall be condemned to hell on account of their wicked lives. Ah, my dear brethren, let us serve God zealously during the short and uncertain time of our lives, that we may not be amongst the number of those unhappy ones. I have promised to speak to you of a society, the like of which has never been seen on earth, a society that all men should do their utmost to avoid; that is, the society of those who must live together in the exterior darkness of hell. Have we not the greatest reason for most carefully avoiding all sin, that none of us may have to dwell in that wretched society? Society, I say; for even if there were no other torment in hell, etc. *Continues as above.*

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**FORTY-THIRD SERMON.**

**ON THE PAIN CAUSED TO THE DAMNED BY THE THOUGHT OF HEAVEN.**

**Subject.**

Heaven and its elect shall be to the reprobate an eternal hell.  
—*Preached on the second Sunday in Lent.*

**Text.**

*Transfiguratus est ante eos.*—Matt. xvii. 2.

“He was transfigured before them.”

**Introduction.**

If this transfiguration of Our Lord, in which He manifested for a short time some few rays of His divinity, and the figure of His eternal glory in heaven—if this occasioned such lively joy to His disciples that Peter, ravished out of himself, wished to remain in that place forever, what must be the joy of the elect in heaven, where the God of all beauty shows Himself face to face as He is, and allows Himself to be possessed by them for all eternity? “Lord, it is good for us to be here,” we shall all cry out in ecstasy, if we shall have the happiness of gaining heaven. Unhappy, reprobate sinners! you, alas! shall never for all eternity have any share in this manifestation of heavenly glory, or in the joy of the elect. Yet what am I saying? Truly, even you shall have your share in it. But how? you will ask, my dear brethren. Are the damned to be one day released and to be admitted to the glory of heaven and the joys of the blessed? Ah, no! they have no hope of that; they are buried in hell forever; but they shall, quite against their will, turn their thoughts and minds to heaven, and contemplate the glory of God and the bliss of the saints. This thought shall be present to their minds for all eternity, and it will make another hell for them, as I now propose to show.

**Plan of Discourse.**

*Heaven and its elect shall be to the reprobate an eternal hell. Such is the whole subject of this meditation. Ah, dear Christians! let us so live that we may one day possess heaven, not in hell, but in heaven itself. Such shall be the conclusion.*

Do Thou, O gracious Saviour, help us thereto by Thy powerful grace, which we beg of Thee through the intercession of Thy Mother Mary, who is ours also, and of our holy guardian angels.

The damned shall be incessantly tormented by the thought that they have lost heaven.

Heaven, a hell! The country of eternal joys, a prison of everlasting torture! The palace of the sovereign Monarch, in which God bestows all the treasures of His goodness, according to the greatness of His magnificence and glory, and inundates His chosen children with a torrent of delights, the least drop of which, according to the holy Fathers, would suffice, if it were let fall into hell, to extinguish that fire and turn the place of torments into a delightful paradise: is that palace, I ask, to be



## *Pain Caused the Damned by Thoughts of Heaven. 61*

changed into a hell? Yes, my dear brethren, so it is. The more joyous and blissful the dwelling of the saints, the more painful shall hell be for the damned souls who are confined in that abyss. First, on account of the constant yearning for the eternal happiness that the damned have lost by their own fault, and can never hope to gain during eternity. The greater and more desirable the good that one longs for, the more intense is the bitterness and disappointment caused by being deprived of it. If you wish to torture a human being, or even a brute beast, in a most cruel manner, chain him up in a prison and place beside him the most costly food and drink that he cannot reach, so that he has to die of hunger and thirst with food and drink before his greedy eyes. Death itself is not so painful as to be thus tantalized. Poor Moses! how was it with thee when God brought thee to the top of the mountain and showed thee from afar the promised land, flowing with milk and honey, and at the same time announced to thee that as a punishment for thy doubting thou wert to have no part therein? Hear, my dear brethren, what the Sacred Scriptures say of this: "And the Lord said to him: This is the land for which I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying: I will give it to thy seed." Consider it well, Moses! But know that it is not for thee! "Thou hast seen it with thy eyes, and shalt not pass over to it."<sup>1</sup> How great must have been the affliction of Moses at hearing those words! But in that affliction you have a mere shadow of the torture caused the damned in hell by heaven itself.

According to the teaching of theologians, following St. Thomas of Aquin, God will impress the souls of the damned with a lively perception of the divine majesty, beauty, and other perfections, in the contemplation of which consists man's perfect happiness; He will also give them a clear knowledge of the ineffable joys and delights which are the lot of His chosen friends and servants in heaven for all eternity. This twofold knowledge shall become much clearer on the day of general judgment, when the reprobate shall see Jesus Christ, the Son of God, in His majesty and glory, and shall behold the happiness of the elect, as I have said already on a former occasion. That knowledge shall remain impressed on their minds for all eternity, nor shall they be

Of which  
they have a  
clear  
knowledge.

<sup>1</sup> Dixitque Dominus ad eum: hæc est terra pro qua juravi Abraham, Isaac et Jacob, dicens: tui dabo eam. Vidisti eam oculis tuis, et non transibis ad illam.—Deut. xxxiv. 4.

## 62 *Pain Caused the Damned by Thoughts of Heaven.*

able to shut it out of their thoughts for a single moment, as the Prophet Daniel saw in his vision: "Many of these that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake: some unto life everlasting, and others unto reproach, to see it always."<sup>1</sup> Mark the words, "to see it always." The eyes of those unhappy wretches shall be opened so that they shall see always. They shall always see the sovereign Good for the possession of which they were created; they shall always see the sovereign Good that they could have gained possession of if they had earnestly wished it; they shall always see the sovereign Good that they have no hope of possessing for all eternity; they shall always see and long eagerly for the joys of heaven, from which they are forever banished. Besides, as the Almighty strengthens and raises above their nature His elect in heaven by a supernatural light called "the light of glory," as theologians tell us, that his chosen friends may have an almost infinite joy and pleasure in contemplating Him; so, on the other hand, the just, avenging God shall fill the minds of His reprobate enemies with a painful light, that the knowledge and contemplation of the joys of the elect may be to them a source of almost infinite torment and unhappiness.

This is called the pain of loss, and is the worst of all.

This is the terrible pain of loss, as it is called, that is so often alluded to in Holy Writ, as a warning to the living that we may all avoid hell, that is, sin. "He shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God," such are the words of St. John in the Apocalypse, speaking of one of the reprobate, "which is mingled with pure wine in the cup of his wrath, and shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the sight of the holy angels, and in the sight of the Lamb."<sup>2</sup> Nearly similar are the words of St. Paul concerning those "who obey not the gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ; who shall suffer eternal punishment in destruction, from the face of the Lord and from the glory of His power."<sup>3</sup> That is, in the midst of their torments they shall know the glory and majesty of the Lord and of His elect, not otherwise than as the sick man, whilst suffering the pains of illness, clearly recognizes what a great good health is, and ardently longs for it.

It is increased by the fact that

The Prophet Isaias also testifies to the fact that one of the worst torments of the damned shall be to suffer while they have,

<sup>1</sup> Multi de his, qui dormiunt in terræ pulvere, erigilabunt: alii in vitam æternam, et alii in opprobrium, ut videant semper.—Dan. xii. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Bibet de vino iræ Dei, quod mistum est mero in calice iræ ipsius, et cruciabitur igne et sulphure in conspectu angelorum sanctorum, et ante conspectum Agni.—Apoc. xiv. 10.

<sup>3</sup> Qui non obediunt evangelio Domini nostri Jesu Christi, penas dabunt in interitum æternæ a facie Domini, et a gloria virtutis ejus.—II. Thess. 1. 8, 9.

## *Pain Caused the Damned by Thoughts of Heaven. 63*

so to speak, before their eyes the joys and delights of the children of God in paradise. "You did evil in My eyes," says the Lord, "and you have chosen the things that displease Me. Therefore thus saith the Lord God: Behold, My servants shall eat, and you shall be hungry: behold, My servants shall drink, and you shall be thirsty: behold, My servants shall rejoice, and you shall be confounded: behold, My servants shall praise for joyfulness of heart, and you shall cry for sorrow of heart, and shall howl for grief of spirit."<sup>1</sup> Ah, how terrible the howling of the damned under those circumstances! The Holy Scripture says of Esau, after he had been deprived by Jacob of his birthright and had lost his father's blessing, that he "roared out with a great cry."<sup>2</sup> Why? For although he had lost his birthright, he still had his father alive with him to console him in his sorrow; he did not secure the first blessing of his father, but he was not accursed on that account, and had still a second blessing to hope for: "And when he wept with a loud cry, Isaac being moved, said to him: In the fat of the earth, and in the dew of heaven from above shall thy blessing be."<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless he "roared out with a great cry," like a lion in his sorrow. Unhappy reprobate! how will you now roar and howl after having lost your eternal inheritance, the blessing and favor of your heavenly Father, the eternal kingdom of heaven, the whole world and everything, being moreover accursed by God and condemned to the fire of hell, when you see with the eyes of the mind your former brothers and sisters, surrounded with shining stars, seated on thrones of glory, and rejoicing in eternal delights! Ah, would that your eyes were buried in the deepest pit of darkness, that you might not be able to see heaven and its elect! Is it not true that you would then be freed from a great part of the hellish torments you have to suffer?

Truly, what would not the rich glutton give if that view were shut out from him! "And lifting up his eyes," says St. Luke, "when he was in torments, he saw." Where did he lift his eyes to? What did he see? "Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his

the damned, while suffering, see the bliss of the elect.

As the rich glutton saw Lazarus in Abraham's bosom.

<sup>1</sup> Faciebatis malum in oculis meis, et quæ nolui elegistis. Propter hoc hæc dicit Dominus Deus: Ecce servi mei conedent, et vos esurietis: ecce servi mei bibent, et vos sitietis: ecce servi mei lætabuntur, et vos confundemini: ecce servi mei laudabunt præ exultatione cordis, et vos clamabitis præ dolore cordis, et præ tristitia spiritus ululabitis.—Is. lxx. 12-14.

<sup>2</sup> Irrugit clamore magno.—Gen. xxvii. 34.

<sup>3</sup> Cumque ejulatu magno fieret, motus Isaac dixit ad eum: in pinquedine terre et in rore oculi desuper erit benedictio tua.—Ibid. 38-40.

## 64 *Pain Caused the Damned by Thoughts of Heaven.*

bosom.”<sup>1</sup> Oh, truly a painful sight! Unhappy wretch that I am! he must have exclaimed; Abraham was rich as I was during life, and by making a proper use of his wealth gained eternal happiness; my riches have hurled me into hell, because I made a bad use of them! Lazarus was formerly a poor beggar, whom I looked on as less than my dog, and he now rejoices in Abraham’s bosom, and is a child of everlasting glory and happiness, while I lie here in the abyss of hell! O joys! of which I cannot hope for a single drop during eternity! O flames! in which I have to burn forever without hope of release! O lost heaven! that I am forced to contemplate against my will! O eternal dwelling-place of hell! in which I shall have to remain forever! “The rich man,” says St. John Chrysostom, “immersed in torments, has only his eyes at liberty, that he may see the other’s happiness, and be thus all the more punished.”<sup>2</sup> And the same can be said of every lost soul.

Again: as hatred and envy toward an enemy is one of the fiercest of passions,

From this painful recollection and consideration of the loss of heaven comes another torture for the damned; for they are filled with the most bitter hatred and envy on account of the happiness of the elect, as I have explained on a former occasion. Envy and jealousy, my dear brethren, is one of the lowest passions that fills the heart with gall, and gnaws at it incessantly, especially when one cannot moderate the violence of the passion, nor hinder the happiness that excites it, but is on the contrary obliged to look on with unwilling eyes while his rival enjoys every delight. All other inordinate passions disturb the heart, but they bring with them some consolation and pleasure, while envy that arises from sorrow at another’s good fortune is a torment without any alleviation, a trouble without any comfort, as St. Cyprian says: “It is an irremediable calamity to hate a man because he is happy.”<sup>3</sup> We find examples enough of this in Holy Writ. Cain, the first-born of men, could not bear his brother Abel. Why? Because Abel’s sacrifices were pleasing to God, whilst his were rejected. “The Lord had respect to Abel and to his offerings. But to Cain and his offerings He had no respect.”<sup>4</sup> This filled him with such chagrin that his counte-

<sup>1</sup> Elevans autem oculos suos, cum esset in tormentis, vidit Abraham a longe, et Lazarum in sinu ejus.—Luke xvi. 23.

<sup>2</sup> Dives totus in tormentis oculis solos liberos habet, ut alterius lætitiā possit aspicere, quæ magis torqueatur.—S. Chrys. Hom. de Dīo.

<sup>3</sup> Calamitas sine remedio est, odisse felicem.—S. Cypr. L. de Zelo.

<sup>4</sup> Respexit Dominus ad Abel, et ad munera ejus. Ad Cain vero et ad munera illius non respexit.—Gen. iv. 4.

## *Pain Caused the Damned by Thoughts of Heaven. 65*

nance became pallid and haggard: "And Cain was exceeding angry, and his countenance fell."<sup>1</sup> He had no rest until he had got rid of his brother by cruelly murdering him. In the same way the sons of Jacob could not bear the sight of their brother Joseph. "Come, let us kill him,"<sup>2</sup> said they to one another, so great was their hatred of him. And what excited them so vehemently against him? A garment somewhat better than theirs, a more friendly look or caress that he received from their father Jacob; this was the sole cause of their jealousy and bitter malignity. Saul, when he heard the people singing hymns of praise to David, "Saul slew his thousands, and David his ten thousands,"<sup>3</sup> became so filled with envy and hatred that to his dying day he sought David's life. Rachel had no rest as long as she saw the son of Lia in her house. Aman fell sick and had to take to his bed, and lost all pleasure in his honors and riches, because Mardochai, whom he could not bear, was favored by the king. The Jews, because Stephen overcame them in argument, "were cut to the heart," as the Scripture says, "and they gnashed with their teeth at him;"<sup>4</sup> envy gnaws at the very marrow of the bones; for the most trifling thing it eats out the very life of a man.

Oh, who can then understand the terrible envy, the madness and rage of the damned in hell, when raising the eyes of the mind unceasingly to heaven, they are forced to behold in the enjoyment of eternal happiness and delights the elect, against whom they have the most bitter hatred, and whom they would willingly drag down from heaven into hell with themselves, if they could? What will not be their rage at seeing the bliss of those whom they persecuted during life, or despised as poor, mean, lowly outcasts, or laughed at as ridiculous fools, or treated contemptuously as their servants or slaves? When they, I say, shall be compelled to behold them for eternity enjoying unspeakable glory and happiness, while they themselves are lying in hell mocked at by demons? This sight, St. Peter Chrysologus and Eusebius Emisenus do not hesitate to say, will cause them such envy that it will be one of their most cruel torments.<sup>5</sup>

The damned shall also be tormented by the thought of the happiness of the elect.

<sup>1</sup> Iratusque est Cain vehementer, et concidit vultus ejus.—Gen. iv. 5.

<sup>2</sup> Venite, occidamus eum.—Ibid. xxxvii. 20.

<sup>3</sup> Percussit Saul mille, et David decem millia.—I. Kings xviii. 7.

<sup>4</sup> Dissocabantur cordibus suis, et stridebant dentibus in eum. Putredo ossium invidia.—Acts vii. 54.

<sup>5</sup> Prima poena alienae beatitudinis conscientia.—Euseb. Emis. Serm. 8. in Symb.

## 66 *Pain Caused the Damned by Thoughts of Heaven*

Thus in this way they shall be worse tormented by the saints than by the demons; the heaven above will be more intolerable to them than hell itself. As Salvianus says: "God will send them a hell from above."<sup>1</sup>

Thirdly:  
they shall  
be torment-  
ed by the  
fact that  
God and His  
saints shall  
mock at  
them in  
their pains.

O just, and at the same time merciful God! what is this? Have not those wretches pains enough in the infernal abyss that Thou must torture them even from heaven? But if they are obliged always to behold Thy heaven in that manner, to their own torment, at least do Thou show, or allow Thy elect to show them some pity. No; the accursed ones have not merited even that comfort. "I will laugh,"<sup>2</sup> is the pitiless answer, at your eternal ruin. "He that dwelleth in heaven shall laugh at them; and the Lord shall deride them,"<sup>3</sup> says the Lord by the Prophet David. "And I will clap My hands together," He says again by the Prophet Ezechiel, when I see them burning in the fire, and hear their howls and lamentations; then shall I rejoice, "and I will clap My hands together, and will satisfy My indignation."<sup>4</sup> And My elect in heaven will also exult over and mock at the damned in hell. "And the smoke of their torments shall ascend up forever and ever,"<sup>5</sup> according to the revelation of St. John in the Apocalypse; that is, the saints in heaven shall always see how the reprobate are tortured in hell. And what will they think and say about it? They will adore the justice of God, and cry out with joy and exultation: Amen! Alleluia! It is right, O Lord! So let it be! Amen! Alleluia! Praise be to God! They have deserved it!

What a  
fearful tor-  
ment that  
is!

And that to my mind, my dear brethren, is the most intolerable torment of the damned. When a man is insulted here on earth, or is overwhelmed by some grievous calamity, and that in presence of his opponent and bitter enemy, who laughs and jeers at him, that mockery seems to him more intolerable than the affront or misfortune itself. What bitter pain it must then cause the damned to see in their God and in the blessed in heaven their sworn, eternal enemies, whose happiness makes them burst with envy, and to be forced to bear forever the mockery and ridicule that those enemies shall cast upon them in their misery? And so it will be, my dear

<sup>1</sup> Gehennam misit e coelo.

<sup>2</sup> Ridebo.—Prov. i. 26.

<sup>3</sup> Qui habitat in coelis iridebit eos: et Dominus subannabit eos.—Ps. ii. 4.

<sup>4</sup> Quia et ego plaudam manu ad manum, et implebo indignationem meam.—Ezech. xxi. 17.

<sup>5</sup> Fumus tormentorum eorum ascendet in sæcula sæculorum.—Apoc. xiv. 11.

brethren. If I, a poor sinner, should go to hell (oh, may God save me from that!), and if you, as I wish from my heart, to heaven, then you will always exult over me in my misfortunes, while I shall always be tortured by your joy. On the other hand, if I go to heaven, and any one of you is lost, then shall I laugh at him for all eternity, although he may have been my best friend, and I shall rejoice at the sight of his sufferings, because thereby the justice of my God is satisfied. What a terrible place hell is! Julian, the apostate emperor, having received a mortal wound from an invisible hand, took a handful of his blood and holding it up to heaven, exclaimed in a very rage of blasphemy: "Satisfy Thyself, O Galilean! Thou hast conquered!"<sup>1</sup> So he called our divine Lord.

Judge from this what will be the horrible curses and blasphemies of the damned in their despairing wrath and madness, when they cry out like mad dogs against God and all who are in heaven. We are burning, they will howl forth, and God laughs at us! We are in the fire of hell, and God and His saints jeer at us! We are suffering extreme torments, and they rejoice at our sufferings! Cruel heaven! Unmerciful God! Barbarous saints, worse than all the demons! Here you must close your ears, pious Christians, in order not to be shocked at the terrible curses and blasphemies that proceed from despairing rage and madness. In this abyss, they howl forth, I am lying in the midst of fire as a holocaust to implacable anger! Who is it that takes such a revenge on me? God. But is it not God who has created me to His own image and likeness? Who has kept me alive for so many years on earth, and given me so many proofs of His goodness? Is it He who now tortures His miserable creature? Alas! He no longer acknowledges me as His creature! Does He not know me? Does He not think of me? Yes. He does think of me; but it is only to torment me, and to laugh at me in the midst of my sufferings. O accursed God! (Still, my tongue!) And who has spoken the sentence of my eternal condemnation? Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Jesus Christ? Does He then act so cruelly towards the souls He ransomed with His blood, souls that He gave up His life on the cross to save from hell? Yes; and that He does because by your sins you have trampled His blood under foot. But is He not my Advocate and Mediator? Yes; He was formerly, but is so no longer; now

Hence come  
curses and  
blasphemies  
against God  
and His  
saints.

<sup>1</sup> Saturare! viciisti Galilæe!

## 68 *Pain Caused the Damned by Thoughts of Heaven.*

He mocks and laughs at you. Oh, be He accursed forever! And Mary, the Virgin whom I have so often called by the sweet name of Mother, the Comfort of the afflicted, the Refuge of sinners, the Mother of mercy, has she too abandoned and rejected me? Yes; she too will mock and laugh at you for all eternity. Oh, then accursed be—alas! I cannot utter the name. You are shocked, my dear brethren, as I see clearly, and perhaps displeased with me for daring to utter publicly such dreadful imprecations and blasphemies as the damned howl forth, and you are right. I may not and cannot continue.

Thus increasing the pains of hell.

But one thought strikes me. O torment of all torments! O hell of all hells! to hate and curse those whom one must acknowledge to be worthy of all love! to blaspheme Him for whom one sighs with the most ardent desire, to possess whom one is filled with the most eager longing! My God! shall I then hate Thee for all eternity with that heart that Thou gavest me that I might love Thee alone, above all things? Shall I curse and blaspheme Thee with that tongue that Thou gavest me to praise and bless Thee and Thy name? O saints of God! O my dearest guardian angel! O Mary, my sweetest Mother! Ah, I dare not think of it! O Jesus Christ my Saviour! O my God, worthy of all love! must I then hate, curse, and blaspheme Thee for all eternity? Is such a thing possible? Yes; and it will infallibly be the case if I die without true repentance, and without sincere amendment of life, and am damned. O torment of all torments! I must again cry out: O hell of all hells!

Hence, we to those who either do not believe in hell, and there are many such.

Let us, my dear brethren, at once shut up hell in our thoughts, and with a deep sigh exclaim in the words of Eusebius Emisenus: "Wo to those who have to experience those things before they believe them!"<sup>1</sup> Before they believe them, I say; because I am not all sure that most men believe in the existence of such a hell; if they do believe and are afraid of it, I cannot understand how to reconcile the lives they lead with such a faith and fear. No; they do not believe in or fear hell, for we hear many saying in a laughing tone: Oh, the devil is not so black as he is painted; people talk all sorts of things about hell, as if they had been there and knew all about it; up to this no one has come back from it to say what it is like. Let hell be hell; priests must have something to preach about; but it is not half so bad as they make out. See how they fear and believe in

<sup>1</sup> Vae! vae! vae! quibus hæc prius experienda sunt, quam credenda!



hell! And so you wicked ones, you do not believe in hell because no one has come back from there to tell you what it is like? Why then do you believe that there is one God in three Persons? Yet no one has come from the other world to tell you about that. But if you believe one and not every thing, you are unbelievers, and deny the Holy Scriptures. If you are right, we have reason to think that the Lord is making fools of us, and that He is uttering only an empty threat when He tells sinners that they shall burn forever in hell. Then must the Catholic Church be a false one, and the holy Fathers and interpreters mere deceivers. Then must you deny your religion, which teaches us this article of faith as well as all the others. \*Wo, I repeat, wo to those who must experience these things before they believe them! Wo to you if you must go to hell before you rightly believe in it!

Ah, Father, others of you say in your own minds, truly I believe in hell, and only too much do I fear it! A cold sweat breaks out on me whenever I think of being damned and burning in that fire forever! Good! so you think and say; but what sort of a life do you lead? Do you show that you really fear hell and dread the idea of suffering forever therein? It is not true; for wherever you go or stay you carry about with you the burden of grievous sin. You eat and drink according to your sensuality, and your sins are seated at table with you; you sleep and idle away your time till late in the day, and your sins are in bed with you; you clothe and adorn yourself, and your sins peep out from your extravagant dress; you go about amongst people, and walk, and joke, and laugh, and play, and amuse yourself at balls and parties, sometimes even during the holy season of Lent, and your sins are with you all the time; you go to church, to the confessional, even to the Table of the Lord to be fed with the immaculate flesh and blood of Jesus Christ, and you bring your sins, and more still than you had before, back with you. What sins? Ah, that you know yourself only too well! Ask your conscience what are the sins that you have not yet properly confessed, or truly repented of, or seriously amended! Ask your coffers in which you hoard up ill-gotten goods! Ask that house, perhaps it is your own, in which you keep the object of an impure love! Ask that room in which men and women meet and spend the whole night, sometimes, in all sorts of dissipation; that you allow, and thus make yourself participator in all the sin

Or who do  
not fear it,  
and they are  
still more  
numerous.

committed! Ask your heart, from which you are unwilling to expel that secret hatred and anger against your fellow-man! Your tongue betrays its sinfulness by its abominable cursing and swearing, by impure conversations and songs, by calumny, detraction, and contumely. Your eyes betray themselves by their unchaste glances, your hands by sinful touches, your mouth by gluttony and drunkenness, even if you tried to hide your sins. And you fear hell? No! It is not true; it cannot be true. You rather wish to go to hell, for you love your sins, although faith tells you that for those very sins, if you do not sincerely repent of them, you shall be sent to hell.

The fear of  
and belief  
in hell  
should in-  
duce us to  
amend.

But if, O sinner! I see that now after the sermon you go with a contrite and repentant heart into the confessional to lay aside at once the burden of your sins, if I am told that one has restored ill-gotten goods, another been fully reconciled to his enemy, a third sent away the person with whom he was living in sin, that in such and such a man there is a great change, that he is much more modest and reserved, more humble, chaste, and temperate, more patient, meek, and devout, more zealous in the service of God than before, then shall I readily believe and acknowledge: yes! those people are in earnest; that man shows that he fears the eternal fire of hell.

Shown by  
an example.

We read in the Dialogues of St. Gregory of a Spaniard named Peter, who fell into a grievous illness so that he lay there for dead, and meanwhile was rapt in spirit into hell to see the torments suffered there. He witnessed there the most terrible tortures, and saw also those who had to suffer them; amongst them he recognized many rich and noble people whom he had known during life. When he came to himself, he told all he had seen, and said too that, as he was trembling with fear lest he too should be condemned to remain there forever, an angel came to him and told him, to his comfort, that he was to return to life, and added these words: "Go back, but in future be most cautious as to your manner of living."<sup>1</sup> After this Peter recovered his health fully, and lost no time in setting hand to the important work; he renounced all his wealth, bade adieu to all the honors and delights of the world, retired into a wilderness, and led such a penitential life that it was evident he had seen hell and was filled with a great dread of it.<sup>2</sup> O sinner! you

<sup>1</sup> Regredere, et qualiter tibi post hac vivendum sit, cautissime attende.

<sup>2</sup> Ut eum infernum videret, et pertimuisse tormenta, etiam tacet lingua, conversatio loqueretur.

## *Pain Caused the Damned by Thoughts of Heaven. 71*

have now spent some time in meditating on hell; enter into yourself and see how you have to live in future, if you wish to escape eternal pains. Make a firm resolution to amend your life; repent of and detest your sins from the bottom of your heart; fear sin more than all other earthly evils; throw yourself at the feet of our crucified Lord, and with true contrition of heart and tears of sorrow beg of Him by the merits of His sacred Passion to be merciful and to pardon you. And be sure that the more carefully you avoid all sin, the freer will you be from the pains of hell. Often say to God: "from the pains of hell deliver us, O Lord!" but add also: from mortal sin, deliver us, O Lord! for that is the only thing that can bring you to hell.

Ah, dear Christians, let us all adhere to this resolution! For God's sake do not forget what you have heard; we have not been treating of trivial matters, but rather of how we are to escape an eternal hell, where there are everlasting torments for all the senses, in the odious company of the demons and lost souls, and where heaven itself is an eternal hell. Oh, wo to us if we should learn what it is by experience before we use the means of escaping it! O Mary, Mother of mercy! do not allow us ever to become the enemies of thee and thy Son, or to blaspheme thee forever! Take us under thy protection now while there is time; obtain for us a true hatred, sorrow, and detestation of our sins, a true love for thee and thy divine Son, and the grace to persevere therein till death, so that we may continue to love and praise thee and thy Son in a happy eternity, and thus enjoy heaven in heaven. Amen.

Conclusion  
and resolution.

### *Another introduction to the same sermon for the fourth Sunday of Advent.*

#### **Text.**

*Videbit omnis caro salutare Dei.*—Luke iii. 6.

"All flesh shall see the salvation of God."

#### **Introduction.**

"All flesh shall see the salvation of God." Shall even the damned see it? Yes; and that shall be on the last day of general judgment, when all men, the reprobate as well as the elect, shall behold Jesus Christ in His glory and majesty. All the better, some may think; those unhappy wretches who are burning

forever in the flames of hell shall have at least that consolation, and shall see their God and Saviour. Yes, my dear brethren; but what a miserable consolation that will be! for it will last only till they, after having seen and acknowledged the heavenly happiness of God and His saints, shall have to take leave of them forever, accursed, rejected, and swallowed up in the abyss of hell; as we have seen on the first Sunday of Advent. But why do I speak of a consolation that lasts for such a short time? Less unhappy would the damned be if they never for all eternity saw Our Lord and the inhabitants of heaven; or at all events they would be free from a terrible torment if that sight were removed from before their eyes when they take their last miserable farewell, and are hurled down into hell. But no! this sight, etc.  
*Continues as above.*

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#### FORTY-FOURTH SERMON.

##### ON THE JUSTICE AND MERCY OF GOD IN CONDEMNING THE SINNER.

###### Subject.

In sentencing the sinner to eternal fire God shows, first, His equity and justice towards the dead; secondly, His goodness and mercy, love and kindness towards the living.—*Preached on the fifth Sunday in Lent.*

###### Text.

*Quis ex vobis arguet me de peccato?*—John viii. 46.

“Which of you shall convince Me of sin?”

###### Introduction.

After the last meditations in which we have been representing to our minds the terrible torments of hell, many a one will perhaps say to himself: O my God! what is this I hear? If it is true that the mercy of God is infinite, that the works of His mercy exceed all His other works; if it is true that “His mercy endureth forever,”<sup>1</sup> as the Prophet David repeats five and twenty times in his psalm, how then can it be that God will thunder forth against the sinner for one mortal sin that terrible sentence to everlasting fire and to the torments of hell? Is not that un-

<sup>1</sup> Quoniam in eternum misericordia ejus.—Ps. cxxxv. 1.

just, nay, cruel? But no more of those blasphemous thoughts! "Which of you shall convince Me of sin?" asks the Lord. True, my dear brethren, it seems incomprehensible; and yet it is in reality right and just; it seems to contradict the infinite love and mercy of God, and yet even therein He shows His love and mercy, as I shall now prove in this sermon.

#### Plan of Discourse.

*In sentencing the sinner to eternal fire, God shows His equity and justice towards the dead: how great must be the malice of sin! This we shall see in the first part. He shows thereby His goodness and mercy, love and kindness towards the living: how foolish for men not to love a God who means so well with them! This we shall see in the second part.*

Just and at the same time merciful God! impress this truth deeply on the hearts of us all, that we may never forget it, and that we may order our lives according to the lesson it teaches. This we ask through the Mother of mercy and the intercession of the holy angels.

But, you will ask again, is it right for one sin, yes, often for one solitary sin, to punish a poor mortal in such a terrible manner? For one sin that may have lasted but a moment to inflict an everlasting punishment in eternal fire? For a false oath, for instance, or a curse uttered in earnest from which a person derives no profit whatever? for a scandal given, although there may not have been the least intention of leading others into sin, nay, although no one may have taken scandal, if the word, or act, or manner of dress, or conduct was in itself scandalous? for the unjust gain of a few shillings that may have been lost immediately after? for a sin wilfully concealed in confession, and what is still more incomprehensible, for a mere thought of vindictiveness or impurity deliberately indulged in, although no act follows it?—how, I ask, can it be right or just to punish such sins with eternal fire? Every law says that the chastisement should, as far as possible, be in proportion to the crime, and not be greater than the criminal deserves. Now if the pleasure of the sin be so short-lived, how can the punishment be terribly and almost infinitely severe? If the sin is momentary, how can the punishment be eternal and incessant? If the sin is committed with the will alone, how can the punishment, and that too an eternal one,

It must be right and just to punish mortal sin with eternal fire, because it is a most just God who inflicts that punishment.

be inflicted on both soul and body? What proportion is there between a moment and eternity? between such a wretched, short-lived pleasure and everlasting fire? Yes, my dear brethren, that is what we cannot grasp with our weak intellect now, and that very consideration led Origen into an error that has been long ago condemned and rejected by the Catholic Church; for he held that the punishment of the damned would come to an end some time or other. But, great God! we submit our minds, we believe with a simple faith what we cannot understand, because Thou hast said that the man who dies with even one mortal sin on his soul unrepented of must be punished with eternal fire. And since it is Thou who pronounceest that severe sentence on the sinner, and breakest the staff and decidest his destiny, since Thou art justice itself, Thy sentence cannot be otherwise than right and just. This should be enough for us without any further examination or scrutiny, and we should humbly acknowledge with Thy servant David: "Thou art just, O Lord! and Thy judgment is right."<sup>1</sup> Meet and just is it that Thou shouldst condemn the sinner to eternal fire!

And no injustice is done the sinner, because he makes deliberate choice of it.

Yet to represent in some degree to our weak understanding the justice of this sentence, I will tell you, my dear brethren, what I have learned of the matter from the holy Fathers and the Scripture. In the first place it is a common saying that no injustice is done by acting towards a man according to his will.<sup>2</sup> He who can choose between good and bad and deliberately selects the latter, cannot complain of being ill-treated; if he did so we might say to him: but, you fool! why did you not make a different choice? You were quite at liberty to do so. He who voluntarily and without compulsion takes up a heavy load cannot have the least right to say that people oppress him. It is no doubt very painful to burn in a fire; but if I wilfully leap into it, or compel another to throw me in by violence, can I say that I am treated unjustly and cruelly? No; let the punishment be as severe as you wish, the man who undergoes it has no right to complain if he chooses it himself. Now who is there to compel a man to go into that terrible fire of hell? Has not every one, as long as he lives, the free choice of making his eternal dwelling in heaven or in hell? God, says the wise Ecclesiasticus to us all, "hath set water and fire before thee: stretch forth

<sup>1</sup> *Justus es, Domine; et rectum judicium tuum.*—Ps. cxviii. 137.

<sup>2</sup> *Volenti non fit injuria.*

thy hand to which thou wilt. Before man is life and death, good and evil; that which he shall choose shall be given him." You must either keep the commandments of God, and then heaven is your own: "If thou wilt keep the commandments, . . . they shall preserve thee;"<sup>1</sup> or else if you are not pleased to do that, hell is the place appointed for you. The reprobate man, before things came to such a pass with him, knew all this very well; why then did he choose hell? Who forced him to commit sin? No one but himself. So that he did not wish to be better off. And even if there is such a great difference between a momentary pleasure and eternal sorrow, is it not in your power and mine, O sinner! to enjoy the pleasure, or to reject it? Therefore you are indeed foolish and mad to purchase it at such a dear price; but God is and remains just in demanding the payment agreed on for it, and in chastising you with the rod that you knew well He had in readiness for your crime.

Moreover the sinner forces the God of justice, and so to say compels Him by violence to condemn him to hell. How so? God seeks and desires nothing more than that man by keeping the commandments should escape hell and be eternally happy in heaven; to that end He gives us so many warnings to be on our guard against the fire of hell, and He threatens us with that terrible punishment that fear may urge us to work out our salvation, as we shall see more in detail in the next part. And how long does He not wait for the sinner who is actually in mortal sin, although He has then the undoubted right of sending him at once into hell? How often does He not, as it were, beg and pray, and urge him to come back, promising to receive him again as His dear child, and assuring him that the angels will rejoice at his conversion? Is not that a clear proof that the good God does not wish the sinner to be lost? Now, if in spite of all this the sinner obstinately persists in wickedness, and continues to be the enemy of God; if he says, by his actions: I do not wish to be free from sin; I know that eternal fire is my doom; let it be so; let me go to hell; it is nothing to me; I will not be converted; then is the Lord God, on account of His infinite holiness and justice, which do not allow Him to leave wickedness unpunished, compelled, as it were, to do what He is unwilling to do, and to condemn to hell that man whom He would will.

<sup>1</sup> Apposuit tibi aquam et ignem; ad quod volueris porrigere manum tuam. Ante hominem vita et mors, bonum et malum; quod placuerit ei dabitur illi. Si volueris mandata servare, conservabunt te.—Eccles. xv. 17, 18, 16.

ingly have had with Himself in heaven. Hence the man cannot complain of being unjustly treated, or say that his punishment is too great, for he himself has wilfully chosen that punishment. "It belongs to the justice of the strict Judge," says St. Gregory, "that they should never be without punishment whose minds during life were never without sin, and that there should never be an end of punishing that wicked man who, when he could have done so, was unwilling to desist from crime."<sup>1</sup>

Because the malice of sin is much greater than this eternal punishment.

Besides, on account of His infinite majesty God has full power and authority to compel man under pain of eternal punishment to obey His law. And we see in earthly tribunals and in the affairs of common life that the length and severity of the punishment is not always according to the duration of the crime, or the damage done by it. The thief who has injured another man in his property, an injury that is easily repaired, must lose his life and everything else with it, a loss that is an eternal one for him, for life cannot be again restored to him; he is hung up on a gallows and remains there until his carcass rots away, although the theft did not take more than a minute to accomplish. A poor soldier is often sentenced to death by court-martial for a fault that he may not have looked on as even a venial sin, for going a few steps away from his post, or as often happens, for taking a few apples or turnips out of another person's garden. Now if those punishments are looked on as right and just under the circumstances, what are we to think of the gravity of a crime that is committed against the sovereign God? Oh, truly in this case we must look, not at the crime committed, but at the Person who is thereby insulted and offended. The gravity and malice of a mortal sin is, according to St. Thomas, in a certain sense infinite, because it is an offence against the infinite majesty of God, who is worthy of infinite honor, fear, and love. Now if the punishment is to equal the guilt, mortal sin deserves infinite punishment, because its guilt is in a sense infinite, and if the sinner departs this life unrepentant and without being reconciled to God and atoning for his sins, he is justly condemned to suffer never-ending pains and torments. Therefore no wrong is done him, nor is he treated cruelly in being sentenced to eternal fire, which, although it will never come to an end, could still be infinitely worse than it is. Hence it is the general teaching of

<sup>1</sup> Ad districti Judicis justitiam pertinet ut nunquam careant supplicio, quorum mens in hac vita nunquam voluit carere peccato; et nullus detur iniquo terminus ultionis, quia, quam diu voluit, habere nolit terminum criminis.—S. Greg. in Moral. Id. L. 4. Dial.



theologians that God shows mercy even in hell, and chastises sin much less than it deserves.

Thirdly, this punishment is, according to St. Bernard, right and just, "because with reason is the chastisement eternal, since the guilt can never be blotted out."<sup>1</sup> You know, my dear brethren, what goes on in the workshop of the artist who is making a statue out of metal; while the furnace is glowing, the metal melting, and the tools all in readiness, he can make whatever statue he pleases—a man, an angel, a lion, a devil. But when the metal has been already poured out and has grown cold, can he then improve on or change the statue that has just been made? No; as it comes from the mould so it must remain. Christians! as long as we are in this life we are like the molten metal, and can become a likeness of God by grace, or a likeness of the devil by sin; when death comes, the casting is over, and we retain the figure we receive therein, that is, in our last moment. If it is the diabolical figure of a reprobate sinner it cannot be changed any more, and the sinner is no longer in a state to do proper penance or to awaken a meritorious contrition for his sins. Nay, according to St. Gregory, the reprobate are not only incapable of meritorious contrition and sorrow, but for all eternity they will retain obstinately and pertinaciously the wicked will in which they died. Although they know that God is their only happiness and is worthy of all love, they will hate and curse Him forever. From this again the conclusion is evident: since the malice of sin lasts forever, God must hate and punish it forever; and since the sinner, now obstinately persisting in his wickedness, does not cease to be wicked and to curse his Creator, neither can God cease to take vengeance on the sinner. Consequently it is and must be true that eternal fire is meet chastisement for even one mortal sin. Yes, O Lord! we again acknowledge that "Thou art just, and Thy judgment is right." The damned themselves, in spite of their torments, shall to their own greater confusion be forced to make the same confession and to acknowledge that they are justly treated, rightly condemned to eternal fire.

For the damned are never freed from their sins, and shall remain obdurate in evil forever.

My dear Christians, what are we to think of all this? O sin, sin! what a terrible monster thou art, since thou alone compellest the infinitely merciful and good God to punish without mercy in everlasting fire the creatures whom He loved even to the death of the cross; and that punishment too is not only meet

From this we see what a hideous monster it is; and yet it is committed so wantonly.

<sup>1</sup> Merito ultio sempiterna deæviet, quod nunquam possit culpa deleri.

and just, but is even far too mild and merciful to compete with thy malice! O sin! would that men knew thee as thou art, and hated and detested thee as thou deservest! Meanwhile, how little thou art feared! how easily committed by all sorts of men! how increased and multiplied without number every day! As little is thought of thee as of a pane of glass falling out of a window; nay, many a one is sorely troubled at the latter trifling accident who can laugh and joke after having committed a grievous sin! Can we still wonder, my dear brethren, that the just God inflicts the terrible punishment of hell-fire on sin, since even by the threat of that direful penalty He has been able so little to destroy sin? Can we still have a doubt of His justice when He threatens the obstinate sinner with eternal flames? To my mind He shows therein not merely His equity and justice towards the reprobate, but also His infinite mercy, goodness, and kindness towards the living, as we shall see in the

### Second Part.

By the threat of eternal punishment God shows His love for us, and His earnest desire for our salvation: like a father.

What greater proof of goodness, kindness, and mercy could the Almighty give us than His earnest effort and desire to make us all happy, to give Himself and infinite joys to us as our possession, and to have recourse to all possible means to carry out this design of His? Now when we consider the matter duly, we shall see that He has given us no clearer proof of His will to make us happy, no more powerful means to compel us, so to speak, to attain happiness, than the threat to punish us with eternal fire if we refuse to do His will, to fulfil His desire to have us in heaven. For when I hear a father saying to his son with a friendly, smiling countenance: my dear child, be good; conduct yourself becomingly, and you shall remain with me always, and I shall leave you a hundred thousand ducats in my will; and threatening him moreover with a serious face, saying: but if you lead a bad, scandalous, reckless life, and bring shame and disgrace on yourself before the world, and reject the inheritance I offer you, be assured that whenever I lay my hands on you I will not only disinherit you completely, but will moreover shut you up in prison, and daily have you scourged till you bleed: what should I think of that father? That he is a cruel, unmerciful man, who is altogether too severe with his children, and takes pleasure in their misfortunes? Eh! that might be said with reason of those parents who through foolish love or damnable sloth allow all lib-

erty to their children, and never chastise their vices or put any restraint on them, or who try to do all with sweet, honied words, like Heli with his wicked sons. My dear children, they say, what is this I hear of you? You must not do that again! It is easy to say, you must not do that again! The children pay little heed to such words, and are only worse than before. Parents of that kind, I say, are really cruel to their children, and actually desire and cause their ruin. But that cannot be said of the father of whom we first spoke; for he shows by his threats that he truly loves his son, and that he is in earnest in desiring to have him prosperous and happy.

Even so does God, our heavenly Father, act towards us, His adopted children. He offers an eternal inheritance of infinite goods, an eternal heaven filled with all imaginable joys as the reward of our obedience and service, and that too a short service that lasts only as long as this mortal, uncertain life of ours. See, He says to every one; take upon you My sweet yoke; remain faithful to Me only for a short time; love Me and keep My commandments; I will give you help and grace enough to do what I require of you; if you go wrong now and then, come back to Me and do penance; My sole desire is to make you happy in that way forever; even in this life you will have a most sweet consolation, and rest, and joy of conscience; hereafter you shall be where I am Myself; I will give you Myself as your eternal reward; for every thought, act, and word of yours that is prompted by love for Me I will bestow on you a special joy that shall last forever. But if you refuse Me that short service, if you abandon and insult Me, although I have given you no occasion to do so, and persist in your obstinacy till death, and thus prevent Me from fulfilling My desire to make you happy, then I will cast you into the lake of fire in which you shall burn forever without hope of release. You must either go to heaven, where I wish you to be, or else suffer for eternity in hell.

Suppose now, my dear brethren, that God had said nothing of this threat, and that the sinner had nothing to fear but the loss of the promised reward, although that loss would be in itself a most severe punishment; or take away hell and put in its place a temporal fire that sooner or later shall come to an end, how many would then, do you think, go to heaven and be eternally happy there? O holy souls! who inflamed by the love of God serve Him, not through fear of punishment or hope of reward, but

So does God  
act with us.

And if He  
had not  
threatened  
us with that  
punishment  
hardly one  
would be  
saved.

simply for His own sake, and desire nothing more than that His holy will should be perfectly accomplished in you, and that you could thereby give Him some pleasure—holy souls, I say, how few you are compared to the vast multitude of men! And indeed at first even you were not so perfect, but had to begin by the fear of hell before ascending to such a high degree of charity. Ah, if we were all like you in this particular, the fire of hell might well be extinguished! I acknowledge that we have all reason enough to have the same sentiments as you; for the great, good, and infinitely amiable God deserves that we should all serve Him in the most perfect manner, and gratuitously, and the heaven of joys merits well that we should spend a thousand million years and a million of lives, if we had them, in all sorts of penitential works to gain it; but, alas!—ah, how blind we are!—although faith assures us that besides heaven there is the everlasting fire of hell, that every mortal sin deserves hell, that he who dies in mortal sin shall lose heaven and be condemned to that fire, how recklessly and carelessly we live on in sin! Purgatory? But what is it after all? Why should we be afraid of it, so to speak? It lasts only for a time. And what sort of a life would there be in the world if there were nothing of the kind to fear? Oh, I repeat, if God were to extinguish the fire of hell the world would be a thousand times worse than it is; if God were to extinguish the fire of hell there would be no human souls in heaven.

Hence we should thank Him for having appointed hell as a punishment for sin.

Therefore, since God earnestly desires to make all men happy, He is compelled to threaten us with that grievous penalty; so that they who refuse to be led gently by love and the desire of a reward may at least be driven into heaven by violence through the fear of eternal punishment. And hence in this respect we owe the Almighty our sincerest thanks for His great goodness and mercy in thus menacing us with hell-fire, and compelling us to work out our salvation, to avoid evil, to strive after virtue, in order to be happy with Him forever in heaven.

Folly of most men in wilfully hurling themselves into hell.

But what should be my thoughts now? What should first and most excite my astonishment? Thy eager desire, O God of goodness! to make us happy? for in order to drive men into heaven Thou hast been compelled to make hell; or rather the stupidity of most men, which is enough to make heaven and earth wonder? for even the threat of hell is not powerful enough to curb their madness and folly; in spite of it they refuse to serve such a well-meaning God; they will not allow Him to drag them to

heaven even by the fear of such a penalty. There is a hell and an eternal hell, and yet there are sinners who offend God! There is an eternal hell; Christians know it, and yet that hell is daily filled with Christians! O my God! is it possible that such wretched creatures are to be found whose doom is already sealed? who while I speak of them are actually immersed in those hellish flames? Is it possible that there are amongst us some whose lot will be to be buried in that lake of fire? Ah, truly, my dear brethren, the most of us should be there now if God had dealt with us according to our merits; and most men shall one day burn in hell forever, because in spite of all warnings and threats they recklessly persist in sinning. What am I to think of this? What to attribute it to? Whence comes such amazing stupidity? Yet why do I ask?

Do you all believe in hell? I must again ask you, as I did on last Sunday. Do you believe that all that has been said about the terrible sentence passed on the reprobate is true? Or do you perhaps look on it as a mere fiction and fable? Perhaps I have tried to make you swallow an invention of my own? What! you exclaim; we are good Christians and Catholics, who learn from our faith that the eternal fire of hell is an infallible truth. That I am well aware of; but still I ask the same question; do you all believe in this truth? It cannot be that you believe it. True, you all say with the lips, I believe. But you disprove your words by your actions. Those men and women live on without care or uneasiness in their old vices; they, too, say, I believe in an eternal hell. That dissolute man who does nothing but curse and swear at every one in the house, who spends in drinking what should go to the support of his wife and family: he believes in an eternal hell. That vain woman who adores the world and its luxurious customs as her God: she believes in an eternal hell. That libertine who turns to ridicule the laws of the Church, and spiritual and divine things, and even laughs at hell itself: he believes in an eternal hell. That young man, that husband, who day and night seeks the gratification of his sensual desires, who is still in the proximate occasion of sin, persisting in an unlawful intimacy: he believes in an eternal hell. That young girl who keeps bad company, and is an occasion of unlawful desires to many by her extravagance in dress, thus placing a stumbling-block in their way: she believes in an eternal hell. Those people who consume the days and

It comes  
from a want  
of faith.

years of their lives in idleness, seeking one amusement after another, and utterly ignoring and forgetting God: they believe in an eternal hell. Those people who sacrifice their souls for a wretched gain, or to gratify some evil passion or inclination: they believe in an eternal hell. Those sinners who go to confession only at Easter time, who never make a good confession, who never truly repent of their sins, nor amend their lives: they believe in a hell, in an eternal hell, in the everlasting fire of hell. But how is that possible? "Why do you believe," I ask them all with Salvianus; "why do you believe what God says if you do not fear what He threatens?"<sup>1</sup> Are you then able and willing to endure the terrible fire of hell for all eternity? No, they all answer; we have neither the power nor the will to do that. But the infallible Son of God assures you, the fundamental truths that God has revealed, the laws and ordinances of the holy Gospel of Jesus Christ, the apostles and prophets of Christ, all tell you that the life you are leading can bring you no other way but straight to the eternal fire of hell. Let each one go in spirit down to hell and see what is to be seen there. Behold that vast multitude of damned souls; who are they? Are they not the unchaste? Yes; then out with the truth at once and say: I am just like them, and am immersed above the ears in the same filth. Who are those others? The vindictive, who during their lives refused to forgive or be reconciled to their enemies. And I too am full of hatred and anger against those who offend me; I cannot and will not bring myself to pardon them according to the Christian law. Who are those? Perhaps some who, after having done penance, have relapsed into their former sins. That is exactly the way in which I act; ah, how often have I not on the very day on which I sought to be reconciled to God fallen back into the sins that I had repented of and confessed! What great crowd of souls is that? Perhaps those who, devoured by avarice, have stretched forth their hands to seize unjustly the goods of others for their own advantage and that of their friends, making use for that purpose of all kinds of underhand dealings, lies, and deceit. I too am guilty of injustice; my hands too are stained with ill-gotten gains. Who are these? Perhaps those who have deferred repentance till the end of their lives, and have gone into eternity unprepared. Even I have risked that too, and am still risking it; for I am now actually in such a state

<sup>1</sup> *Cur credis quod Deus dixit, et non times quod Deus minatur?*

that if death surprises me I shall be found just as unprepared and unrepentant as they were. But now, if I am not less, but more guilty in the sight of God than they, why am I not afraid of being eternally rejected by God as they are, and condemned to hell forever? What reason have I to desire or ask mercy from God, since others like me, and perhaps not near so bad or wicked, have been punished by the divine justice in hell-fire? "Neither dost thou fear God," said the penitent thief hanging on the cross to his impenitent companion; "neither dost thou fear God, seeing thou art under the same condemnation." The same you can say to yourself, turning your thoughts and the eyes of your mind to the many burning in hell who are guilty of the same sins as you: "Neither dost thou fear God, seeing thou art under the same condemnation." Neither do you fear God, that just and strict Judge, although you are as guilty as many others who are actually lying in hell, and you know that you have sins on your soul that you must suffer for eternally. Nevertheless, O sinner! you go on unconcerned in the same vicious life. How can faith harmonize with such conduct? No! no! To no purpose have I sent your thoughts down to hell to contemplate there the damned who are like you. You do not believe in hell; you do not wish to believe that an eternal fire is appointed for the wicked.

And why should you not believe it? Is it not an article of faith taught by the true Christian, Catholic Church, as well as all the other articles? It is as true as that we must all die. It is as true as that there is one God, and in that one God three Divine Persons. Have you perhaps lost all faith? Formerly, while you were still good and pious, you believed firmly that there is an eternal hell for impenitent sinners, because God has revealed it. Is there then in your opinion no hell any more because you live wickedly? Because you have so often deserved the fire of hell? Because you wish to sin without fear or restraint? If we knew of hell only on the authority of some profane historian worthy of credit, who has handed down the tale to posterity; if it was only a tradition that there is an eternal hell; nay, if we had only some reasonable grounds to suspect the existence of such a place for the punishment of the impenitent sinner, even then, O my God! every sensible man should shudder with fear and anguish at the bare thought of the pos-

Faith is  
weakened  
by a wicked  
life.

\* Neque tu times Deum, quod in eadem damnatione es.—Luke xxiii. 40.

sibility of his being hurled into such a terrible fire. Such a fearful evil, if it be true, should certainly act as a restraint on every one, and be an incentive to all to lead good lives for a short time, lest they be cast into that place of torments. But it is a truth revealed by God, who is infallible; a truth that all the faithful have up to this firmly believed; and you do not believe it? And you do not believe it, although you have deserved hell? O wo! I repeat again with Eusebius; wo to those who have to learn by experience what hell is before they believe in it!

Conclusion  
and thanks-  
giving for  
having been  
so often  
saved from  
hell.

My dear brethren, you believe, do you not, that there is a hell? Yes, O God! I and all here present hold it as an undoubted truth, and we thank Thee from our hearts for forcing us to serve Thee and thus to gain heaven by threatening us with that hell! And one thing I am specially bound to thank Thee for, and that is, for having had patience with me for such a long time, although I have deserved hell many and many a time by my sins. Even at this moment there are burning in that terrible fire, without distinction, all sorts of people—mighty princes and poor beggars, nobles and common people, tender ladies and coarse peasant girls, masters and servants, superiors and inferiors, clerics and laics, learned and ignorant, old and young, all Christians who have perhaps committed less sin than I; and I am still alive! By those very lost souls Thou hast warned me to live more carefully, so as to escape sharing in their punishment. O my good God! what do I not owe Thee for this? Have I not been senseless and mad to deserve that fire for the sake of some wretched passion or worthless object? In future, O Lord! I will show by my conduct that I fear Thee and Thy threats of hell. Ah, dear Christians! for God's sake order your lives so that you may not have one day to descend into that eternal fire. The time we have here is very short; let us use it so that we may be eternally happy! And do Thou, O God of mercy! grant that the thought of this fire may sink so deeply into my mind and into the minds of my hearers that it may never be forgotten by us! Grant that in all temptations, in all occupations, in all joys and pleasures, this thought may be present to us; that it may be our first on awakening in the morning, our last on retiring to bed at night. For as long as we think of hell with a lively faith, it is impossible, as Thou Thyself hast assured us, for us to fall into it. Therefore we must enter on the right way, and, which is the only object Thou hast in view in threatening us with an eternal hell, arrive at the possession of Thyself in everlasting joys. Amen.



# ON THE ELECT AT THE LAST DAY.

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## *FORTY-FIFTH SERMON.*

### ON THE CALLING OF THE ELECT TO HEAVEN.

#### Subject.

The invitation of the elect to heaven should be an incentive to all of us to endure joyfully any labor or trouble, cross or suffering that may occur in the service of God.—*Preached on the feast of St. Stephen, the first martyr.*

#### Text.

*Ecce video cœlos apertos, et Filium hominis stantem a dextris Dei.*—Acts vii. 55.

“Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God.”

#### Introduction.

It is hard to have to suffer injuries, insults, persecution, banishment, stoning even to death; and to have to endure those things when one is innocent and has done no harm to any one is still harder; but worst of all is to have to suffer those things from one's own countrymen to whom one has tried to do good. Such was the experience of the holy Protomartyr, St. Stephen, as we learn from the Acts of the Apostles; and how did he endure it? With the greatest patience and meekness towards his persecutors and tormentors, with the utmost joy and consolation of heart. To have this joy and consolation all he did was to raise his eyes to heaven: “Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God.” Heaven, he thought, is opened and invites me to enter after my suffer-

ings here; therefore I must and will bear with joy what I now have to bear. My dear brethren, if in the midst of torments the mere sight of heaven and the Saviour therein caused St. Stephen such great joy, how indescribable must be the consolation and exultation of the just on that day when, freed from all tribulation, they shall see the whole heavens opened, and Christ in His majesty and glory surrounded with angels? when they shall hear His sweet voice calling and inviting them into His heaven: "Come, ye blessed of My Father"?<sup>1</sup> This joyful invitation shall form the subject of to-day's meditation.

#### Plan of Discourse.

*The invitation of the elect to heaven should be an incentive to all of us to endure joyfully any labor or trouble, cross or suffering that may occur in the service of God. Such is the whole subject.*

Judge of the living and the dead! we beg of Thee through Thy dearest Mother and our holy guardian angels, to impress this loving invitation so deeply on our hearts that we may be encouraged so to live in future as to be amongst the number of the elect who are to hear that invitation.

Impossible to understand what the joy of the elect will be on hearing this sentence.

When the sheep shall have been separated from the goats, the just from the wicked, each one according to his rank, which depends solely on his merit, being placed in the position assigned to him; when the books of conscience have been opened and the works of men, bad and good, have been juridically examined and published before heaven and earth down to the least idle word and the most secret thought, "then shall the King say to them that shall be on His right hand:" (lift up your eyes and heads, O chosen souls! hear the last sentence, the desirable invitation for which your bodies, long rotting in the earth, but now glorified, have been waiting so eagerly)—then shall the sovereign Judge with benignant countenance and in a most loving manner turn to His chosen children and say to them: "Come, ye blessed of My Father, possess you the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."<sup>2</sup> O comforting words! Before we consider them in due order, think, my dear brethren, how joyfully they must resound in the ears and minds of the just. But

<sup>1</sup> Venite benedicti Patris mei.—Matt. xxv. 34.

<sup>2</sup> Tunc dicit rex his qui a dextris ejus erunt: venite benedicti Patris mei, possidete paratum vobis regnum a constitutione mundi.—Ibid.

who can understand the greatness of this joy, and describe it to us? Ah, we shall never comprehend it until we shall have the fortune of hearing those words addressed to ourselves.

But to have some little idea of it, imagine that the son of a great king is about to choose a bride out of some princely or royal family; what hopes and fears are excited as to the object of his choice who is to be raised to royal dignity! Now if this good fortune, which is considered a great thing in the eyes of the world, should fall to the lot of some poor and noble young lady, who is chosen and publicly proclaimed queen on account of her beauty and virtue, what a change would take place among all the people! What felicitations and joy in the happy family! And what would be the sentiments of the bride herself? We find in the Holy Scripture an example of this kind in the person of Esther, who being an orphan was adopted and cared for by Mardochai. Meanwhile King Assuerus had divorced his queen Vasthi, and had caused all the most beautiful maidens to be assembled from all his provinces in order to select one of them as his queen; no one, says the Scripture, dared appear before or approach the king, "unless the king desired it, and had ordered her by name to come." Poor Esther! what were thy thoughts then? What wert thou thinking of when the king called thee? Yet thou art to be the one preferred before all the others. As soon as Assuerus saw her he "loved her more than all the women, . . . and he set the royal crown on her head, and made her queen instead of Vasthi."<sup>1</sup> Consider, my dear brethren, the great joy that must have filled the heart of Esther at this unexpected piece of good fortune.

That joy  
shown by  
similes.

Let us represent to our imaginations a far more ordinary stroke of good luck than that. A lottery, as often happens in large towns, is published in the newspapers, offering for a few shillings the chance of winning hundreds and thousands of pounds. Suppose now that all the preliminary arrangements have been made, the time is come, the prizes and the names of the winners are drawn and read out in public before the people; as is generally the case in such things, a child is seated on a stage between two judges, and with one hand draws out a scrap of paper on which is written the prize, with the other a second scrap containing the name of the winner. How the people then

Further  
explained  
by similes.

<sup>1</sup> Nisi voluisset rex, et eam ventre jussisset ex nomine. Adamavit eam rex plus quam omnes mulieres, et posuit diadema regni in capite ejus, fecitque eam regnare in loco Vasthi.  
—Esth. ii. 14, 17.

gape and stare; how they prick their ears to hear the name! The paper is opened and the crier calls out the prize: "four thousand pounds!" How excited all are to know who is the lucky man! The paper with the name is then drawn; who is it? A poor servant-maid, so you are to imagine, who has with great difficulty saved enough out of her small salary to pay for her lottery ticket; she is the recipient of that large sum. Poor girl! what are your feelings on hearing the good news? I believe that it makes you almost beside yourself, and that you can hardly understand the shouts and congratulations of the people at seeing you thus raised from poverty to a condition of affluence. Let us go still farther in our efforts to picture that great joy to our minds; and this time I descend to mere child's play. How great the joy and exultation of the student when at the end of the year he is called on to mount the stage before all the people, there to receive the first golden book at the end of the play! This prize, small as it is, for often the book is not worth more than a few shillings, is yet much coveted, for it is a mark of honor and a proof of diligence, and being given before the public causes such satisfaction as can hardly be realized except by the student himself who receives it; his parents, if they are present, are frequently unable to restrain their tears, so great is the consolation and joy they experience, especially when there are friends and acquaintances to add to the festive occasion by their congratulations. Ask one of them what they value that honor and joy at. I am sure they would not give it for a hundred pounds.

Every word  
of the  
invitation  
shall cause  
great joy.

Now a little higher with your thoughts, my dear brethren. I have said that I descend to child's play; but all these instances of good fortune that I have adduced are in reality mere trifles compared to the bliss to which the servants of God shall be called and invited on that great day of the Lord. Then there shall not be question of selecting a bride for a mortal king, or of being called to a perishable crown; for the elect shall be chosen and invited by the eternal Son of God to the everlasting joys of heaven. There is question, not of a hundred or a thousand pounds, but of an inexhaustible treasure of riches, that are to be possessed for all eternity. There is question of a prize of honor that consists, not in a book covered with gilding, but in a reward so valuable that the whole world could not purchase it; because this prize is the infinite God Himself, who is given as it

were on a public stage in the presence and to the great admiration and wonderment of all the angels, saints, demons, and reprobate. And generally speaking it is to the poor in spirit, who on this earth are humbled, persecuted, afflicted, oppressed, and penitent that this prize is given.

How joyfully the welcoming words of Our Lord shall resound "Come, in their ears: "Come, ye blessed of My Father, possess you the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." Let us consider those words briefly. "Come!" Come from combat to victory; from labor to an exceeding great reward; from the lowly cross to glory and honor; from sorrow to joy; from danger to safety; from darkness to light; from a prison to liberty; from banishment to your fatherland; from the vale of tears to the city of eternal rest. Come! for all care is at an end, sorrow is past, there is no longer any danger of sinning and losing My grace.

"Come, ye blessed!" Formerly, as St. Paul says, you were "in labor and painfulness, in much watchings, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness."<sup>1</sup> Formerly you were counted amongst those Christians of whom the same Paul says: "Others had trial of mockeries and stripes, moreover also of bonds and prisons;"<sup>2</sup> "being in want, distressed, afflicted."<sup>3</sup> Now you are blessed and supereminently happy and blissful in all things. Formerly the world hated and persecuted you because you did not live according to the manner of vain worldlings nor adopt the customs of the world; now you are a source of terror to the lovers of the world, who must tremble at your feet. Formerly you were despised, persecuted, often reviled, and cursed; now you are raised above all, admired and blessed by all. Blessed in your soul, which always employed its memory, understanding, and will for its last end and My pleasure; blessed in your body, which wore out its health and strength in My service; blessed are your eyes, with which like holy Job you made a compact that they should not look on any dangerous object, and which have so often wept for your past sins; blessed your ears, which you always kept closed against sinful talk; blessed your tongue, with which you announced My praise; blessed your hands, with which you labored for My honor, and which so often helped Me

Ye blessed  
of My  
Father.

<sup>1</sup> In labore et sermone, in vigiliis multis, in fame et siti, in jejuniis multis, in frigore et nuditate.—II. Cor. xi. 27.

<sup>2</sup> Alii vero ludibria et verbera experti, in super et vincula et carceres.—Heb. xi. 36.

<sup>3</sup> Regentes, angustati, afflicti.—Ibid. 37.

in the persons of the poor and needy; blessed your feet, which so faithfully travelled along the rude, narrow way of the cross in the observance of My commandments; blessed your flesh, which you so often mortified by fasting and other austerities for My sake; blessed your lives, which you formed after the example of humility I gave you; blessed your death, which you willingly accepted in My grace; blessed are you now for all eternity! Come, ye blessed of My Father, who has adopted you as His children in My name, because during your lives you have honored and loved Him as a Father, and have heroically preferred doing His will to all the seeming happiness promised you by the vain world. Blessed are you by Me, because you have readily and willingly taken upon you the cross I laid on you, and borne it after Me daily; blessed are you by the Holy Ghost with whose grace you have worked; blessed are you by My Mother Mary, who is yours also, because you have truly honored and loved her as a mother, from whose hand so many benefits have been showered down on you; blessed are you by My angels, whose good inspirations you have always obeyed; blessed are you by all creatures that you have made use of in My honor, love, and service.

Possess you  
the king-  
dom."

"Possess you the kingdom;" take possession of the crown that you have earned as your lawful inheritance by your good will and My grace; possess that same kingdom in which I with the Father and the Holy Ghost reign forever on a throne of glory; possess the kingdom that has no end, and that, safe from all danger, can never be lost; possess the kingdom that is free from all evil and filled with all imaginable goods that your hearts can desire, in which you shall rule and govern with me for all eternity! "Possess you the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world;" the kingdom prepared for you, which the reprobate through their perverse will did not wish to enjoy, and which is prepared for you in preference to them from the beginning of the world, to which My Father has predestined and chosen you from eternity, because He foresaw that you would spend your lives doing good, and would die in sanctifying grace! Come, My faithful servants, My best friends, My dearest brothers and sisters, My beloved children, the companions of My cross! Come, enter with Me into the joy of your Lord! Far too small are your hearts to contain the vastness of this joy; enter into it then, as into an inexhaustible ocean,

where you shall be inundated with all delights, pleasures, and joys for all eternity! Oh, truly that is a most desirable sentence to hear from the divine Judge!

Reflect on this, Christians. What unspeakable exultation and jubilee shall be amongst the elect when they hear this welcome invitation! How they will congratulate each other when parents shall find themselves with their children, husbands with their wives, friends with their acquaintances, preachers with their hearers, and shall be led as in triumph to Our Lord and to Mary, the Mother of God, amidst throngs of angels! How they will praise and thank God the Father for having created them, God the Son for having redeemed them, God the Holy Ghost for having comforted them; the Blessed Virgin because she was their advocate; the holy angels who guarded them, the preachers, confessors, and teachers who instructed them in good! How they will bless the good works they did during life! O good cross! they will exclaim with the holy apostle St. Andrew! O sweet sorrow! O wholesome pain and suffering! O desirable poverty! O blessed contradiction! which we endured for a short time for God's sake! What exceeding joy you have brought us! O golden tears! sweet repentance with which we formerly bewailed our sins! O blessed prayer that we sent up to heaven! Happy mortification and self-denial with which we subdued our senses! Happy alms and works of charity with which we helped Christ in His poor! to what a height of happiness you have raised us! What an immense gain you have brought us in! And what a joyous echo shall fill the heavenly courts when all the angels and elect shall sing together their canticles of praise, as St. John heard them according to what we read in the Apocalypse: "Alleluia! Salvation, and glory, and power is to our God: for true and just are His judgments. . . . Let us be glad and rejoice, and give glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb is come."<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile the damned, filled with envy and madness at the sight of this triumph of the elect, shall howl and cry out in bitter rage: "These seeing it, shall be troubled with terrible fear, and shall be amazed at the suddenness of their unexpected salvation, saying within themselves, repenting, and groaning for anguish of spirit: These are they whom we had sometime in derision, and for a parable of reproach. We. . . .

<sup>1</sup> Alleluia! Salus et gloria et virtus Deo nostro est: quia vera et iusta iudicia sunt ejus. Gaudeamus et exultemus, et demus gloriam ei: quia venerunt nuptiæ Agni.—Apoc. xix. 1, 2, 7.

The feelings  
of the elect  
and the  
damned  
on hearing  
this sen-  
tence.

esteemed their life madness, and their end without honor;" these are the people whom we considered miserable, whose humility we deemed ridiculous folly: "Behold how they are numbered among the children of God, and their lot is among the saints."<sup>1</sup> But we are rejected among the goats and demons; we wretches have to burn in unquenchable fire, while they enter in triumph into eternal joys!

The consideration and expectation of it should now encourage us to despise the invitations of the devil, the world, and the flesh.

Ah, joyful words, Come, ye blessed! May I hear you one day! My dear brethren, I do not doubt that during the meditation every one of you forms the same wish and desire in his heart, and says to himself: may I too be among the number of the elect on that day to receive that blissful invitation! And who could help forming such a wish? If we had a thousand lives, should we not cheerfully give them all to have the good fortune of hearing that sentence from the lips of Jesus Christ? But we can have it, if we wish, and that too with one life only, and a very short and uncertain life, if we only serve God truly while we are in it. The treacherous world often invites us now with flattering words: Come, it says; "let us eat and drink."<sup>2</sup> "Let us enjoy the good things that are present. . . . Let us fill ourselves with costly wine and ointments;" let us spend our short lives in dancing and amusing ourselves; who knows when we shall die? The corrupt flesh says to us: "Let us crown ourselves with roses before they be withered."<sup>3</sup> Let us enjoy ourselves while we are young and have the opportunity! Come! cries out perfidious Satan; I will make you great and honored before the world; I will fill your coffers with gold; I will raise you to great power and influence. Christians, do not listen to those invitations! They all lead on to the broad way of destruction; they are invitations that shall one day be followed by the terrible sentence of the Judge, Depart, you cursed! They are invitations that seem delightful at first, but that lead to an evil end, and if we now listen to them we shall have no chance of ever hearing the joyful words, "Come, ye blessed."

And to bear Now our Saviour and future Judge gives us another invitation:

<sup>1</sup> *Videntes turbabuntur timore horribili, et mirabuntur in subitaneitate inexpectatæ salutis. Dicentes intra se, poenitentiam agentes, et præ angustia spiritus gementes: hi sunt quos habuimus aliquando in derisum, et in similitudinem improperi. Vitam illorum aestimabamus insaniam, et finem illorum sine honore. Ecce quomodo computati sunt inter filios Dei, et inter sanctos sors illorum est.*—Wis. v. 2-5.

<sup>2</sup> *Comedamus et bibamus.*—Is. xxii. 13.

<sup>3</sup> *Fruamur bonis quæ sunt. Vino pretioso et unguentis impleamus. Coronemus nos roseis antequam marcescant.*—Wis. ii. 6-8.



“Come to Me, all,” He says; but how? “If any man will come <sup>trials with</sup> after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and fol- <sup>patience.</sup> low Me”<sup>1</sup> on the way in which I travelled while on earth, and in which My holy servants have come after Me: the way of meekness, humility, patience, poverty, crosses, and sufferings. “Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and so to enter into His glory?”<sup>2</sup> There is no other road to heaven for you: “Through many tribulations we must enter into the kingdom of God,”<sup>3</sup> as I have warned you by My Apostle. An invitation that is apparently hard to hear; but “look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is at hand.”<sup>4</sup> Think of the day on which that invitation shall be changed into another joyful one, when to your great consolation you shall hear the words, “Come, ye blessed!” He who now gladly hears the word of the cross, says Thomas à Kempis (a chapter of whose golden book of the Imitation of Christ you ought daily to read), he will hereafter hear the glad invitation to eternal joys. “A patient man shall bear for a time, and afterwards joy shall be restored to him,”<sup>5</sup> such are the comforting words of the Holy Ghost by the wise Ecclesiasticus.

Not without reason did our dear Saviour adduce the simile of the trees when He was speaking of the last judgment, and encouraging us all to be constant and patient: “See the fig-tree, and all the trees: when they now shoot forth their fruit you know that summer is nigh.”<sup>6</sup> Go into a garden in winter and look at all the trees, one after the other; how miserable they seem! They are bare, dry, and sapless; not a green leaf is to be seen on them; they are covered with snow and have hardly the appearance of trees; we cannot tell whether they are to bear apples, pears, or other fruit; they look just like old brooms, and one hardly cares to see them. But what is there to wonder at? It is winter time, and we cannot expect anything else. Wait, however, till the cold is past, and the pleasant spring-time arrives; then the dry, leafless, naked trees shall clothe themselves again;

For after a short sorrow eternal joy shall come. Shown by similes.

<sup>1</sup> Si quis vult post me venire, abneget semetipsum, tollat crucem suam, et sequatur me.—Matt. xvi. 24.

<sup>2</sup> Nonne hæc oportuit pati Christum, et ita intrare in gloriam suam?—Luke xxiv. 26.

<sup>3</sup> Per multas tribulationes oportet nos intrare in regnum Dei.—Acts xiv. 21.

<sup>4</sup> Respicite et levate capita vestra; quoniam appropinquat redemptio vestra.—Luke xxi. 28.

<sup>5</sup> Usque in tempus sustinebit patiens, et postea redditio jucunditatis.—Ecclesi. i. 29.

<sup>6</sup> Videte ficulneam et omnes arbores. Cum producant jam ex se fructum, scitis quoniam prope est æstas.—Luke xxi. 29, 30.

they shall put forth their buds and leaves, and rival in their blossoms the most beautiful flowers; the bees fly round them and suck out their honey; the birds hop about on the branches and sing and frolic the live-long day; then we go with pleasure into the gardens, fields, and forests, to see the beautiful verdure, and to enjoy the song of the birds. So it is with us mortals; in this life many of us are very badly off; one is sick and in pain; another despised and abandoned; another poor and needy; many a one has to plague himself with hard work, and even then can hardly find enough to feed himself and his family; many a one lives in continual care and sorrow, and sighs and moans under the pressure of tribulation; one is in want of this, another of that, until life itself becomes a burden; no one is without the cross. But be not amazed at this; it is winter-time: we are living in the sorrowful vale of tears. Have courage; only serve the Lord zealously, and let each one bear his cross with patience and resignation to the divine will. It will not last long; the gloomy winter shall hold only for a few uncertain years, and then the joyful, pleasant spring shall come. Then shall we hear: "Arise, make haste, my love, my dove, my beautiful one, and come. For winter is now past, the rain is over and gone;" all tribulations have come to an end. "The flowers have appeared in our land," flowers that shall never fade; "the time of pruning is come."<sup>1</sup> "Come, ye blessed of My Father," enter into the eternal joy of your Lord! Oh, how small shall then appear all former labor and trouble; how light and sweet it shall seem in comparison to the immense weight of joy and glory that shall be given to us in return!

When we  
possess this  
joy we  
shall look on  
all past sor-  
row as noth-  
ing.

If we could now open heaven, and ask the elect about the trials, mortifications, and penitential works they endured during their lives for God's sake, what answer would they make us? Even what Our Lord said to His two disciples on the road to Emmaus. They were talking with each other about the passion and death of their Master: "What are these discourses," He said to them, "that you hold one with another as you walk, and are sad?" What! answered one of them, "art Thou only a stranger in Jerusalem?" Art Thou the only one that knowest not what has been done to Christ? "To whom He said: What

<sup>1</sup> Surge, propera amica mea, columba mea, formosa mea, et veni. Jam enim hyems transiit, imber abiit, et recessit. Flores apparuerunt in terra nostra, tempus putationis advenit.—Cant. ii. 10-12.

things?"<sup>1</sup> as if He knew nothing of it, although He understood more of it than any one, and felt all the agony of His bitter death. Our Lord's design in this, says *Silveira*, was to show that all He suffered in His cruel passion seemed as trifling to Him in comparison to the present happiness of His glorified body as if He had forgotten all about it; and therefore He asked: What things? What was done to Him? The same, I say, would be the answer of all the saints in heaven; what? they would say; what have we done on earth? What martyrdom, or penance and mortification, or trouble and sorrow? It is not worth while to speak of those things, nor to ask a question about them. We have forgotten them long ago; we never think of them unless to our own greater consolation, because we have undergone them. They are all nothing compared to the joy we now have; our sorrow was over in a moment; now we rejoice in eternal delights, in which our bodies shall have their share too on that day when we shall hear the sweet voice of our Judge saying to us: "Come, ye blessed."

"Look up, and lift up your heads, because your redemption is at hand." My dear Christians, lift up your heads, or better, your hearts, in spirit. Whenever a temptation to sin attacks you, or some tribulation comes in your way in the service of God, or any cross embitters your life: look up at once to heaven! Think of the last day of the world; imagine that you already hear the words of your Judge: "Come, ye blessed of My Father, possess you the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." Ah, and think at the same time: is then this joyful invitation, which I so long and desire to receive, not powerful enough to keep me for a short time from forbidden pleasures, or to enable me to bear patiently for a while these pains, this sickness, this trouble, this cross and trial?

Thoughts of this kind made a wonderful penitent of *St. Pelagia*, who was once a notorious sinner. She could hardly form a good desire for anything supernatural; she was sunk in the mire of impurity; but on one occasion curiosity and perhaps too the wish to show herself off and excite others to unlawful desires, impelled her to go to a church, in which the holy Bishop *Nonnus* was preaching to the people on the sentence of the Judge on the last day. This so touched her heart that through shame

Exhortation  
to reflect  
often on  
this invita-  
tion.

After the  
example of  
the holy  
penitent  
*Pelagia*.

<sup>1</sup> Qui sunt hi sermones, quos conferitis ad invicem, ambulantes, et estis tristes? Tu solus peregrinus es in Jerusalem? Quibus ille dixit: quæ?—*Luke xxiv. 17-19.*

and fear she covered her face with her veil, began to weep bitterly, and after the sermon made a most contrite confession of all the sins of her life. Pelagia! she said to herself; Pelagia! away with you! this is no place for you! away from the company of men, into the desert! And putting on a penitential garb she went to Mount Olivet, where she built herself a small hut from which she could see the valley of Josaphat. The meditation of the last judgment, said she, has converted me from my sinful life, and brought me back to God; the meditation of the last judgment shall also help me to lead a pious life with God in future. To that end she used to spend the greater part of the day at the window of her hut, looking down into the valley. There, she would say, is the place of judgment, where I and all the people of the world shall one day meet, and await our Judge; in that valley the great account-book shall be opened in which my sins are written; in that valley I shall be either on the left or on the right hand of the Judge; in that valley shall be thundered forth the sentence on the damned: "Depart, you cursed;" in that valley shall be heard the joyful words of the Judge to the elect: "Come, ye blessed." Pelagia, what do you think of this? Will you not serve your God faithfully that you too may hear those joyful words? And whenever the enemy tried to bring her back to her former sinful life by exciting in her unlawful desires, she fled for refuge to the window. Listen, Pelagia, she would say: "Depart, you cursed!" How do you like that? Are you still inclined to sin? And if her fasting, prayer, or mortification seemed too hard to her, she would again run to the window and looking out on the valley of Josaphat, exclaim: "Come, ye blessed!" hear that, Pelagia! Is it not well worth your while to suffer a little for a short time?

Conclusion  
to serve  
God zeal-  
ously, that  
we may  
one day  
receive that  
invitation.

Let us often renew those thoughts, my dear brethren, and make this earnest resolution: I too will serve my God truly to the end! Away, deceitful world, with all your vanities! Begone from me all you who have hitherto tried to lead me into sin; I will listen to your invitations no more: I will not follow your treacherous customs and fashions: I wish to be in the number of the elect who shall on that day hear the joyful words from the lips of their Judge: "Come, ye blessed!" Therefore I will spend the short time that remains to me in Christian humility, meekness, patience, and charity; therefore from this moment forward I give over, O my God! to Thy fatherly providence, myself

and all belonging to me, in joy and sorrow, in consolation and trouble, in crosses and adversity, just as it may please Thee! I am ready for everything, and prepared to do Thy will in all things, that I may one day, as I trust, with child-like confidence, hear that desirable, and joyful, and consoling invitation in the valley of Josaphat amongst the sheep of Thy fold: "Come, ye blessed of My Father, possess you the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world;" enter into eternal joy. Amen.

*Another introduction to the same sermon for the first Sunday of Advent.*

**Text.**

*His autem fieri incipientibus, respicite et levate capita vestra; quoniam appropinquat redemptio vestra.*—Luke xxi. 28.

"But when these things begin to come to pass, look up and lift up your heads: because your redemption is at hand."

**Introduction.**

But, O Lord! are not these strange words of Thine? Is that the time to lift up our eyes and heads, when the powers of heaven are to be moved, when the stars are to fall from the firmament, when the sea shall overwhelm the earth by its raging waves, when men shall wither away for fear, when that terrible day of judgment is approaching, and in every tomb shall resound the cry: Arise, ye dead, and come to judgment? When we shall see Thee coming in a cloud with great power and majesty, shall we then lift up our heads and await our redemption? Should it not rather be the time for us to bow down our eyes and heads humbly to the earth, to strike our breasts, and to implore mercy? No, says Our Lord; "when these things begin to come to pass, look up and lift up your heads;" rejoice and exult. It is to you I am speaking, faithful servants of God; because fear, anguish, withering away, and despair are only for the wicked on that day. Yes; they indeed may well seek to hide themselves under the earth; they may call on the mountains and hills to cover them. But be you of good heart then, "because your redemption is at hand." My dear brethren, last year as a warning to the wicked I selected as the subject of our meditation the terrible sentence of the Judge against the sinner: "Depart from Me, you cursed,

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into everlasting fire;" and that meditation we made in the holy season of Advent. Ah, do not forget it! Think often of it; consider what it means to be rejected by God, to be accursed by God, to be sent to eternal fire! And now for the encouragement of all in the divine service I shall take a more consoling subject, namely, the far different sentence that shall be passed on the just on that day: "Come, ye blessed," etc. *Continues as above.*

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*FORTY-SIXTH SERMON.*

**ON THE JOYFUL ENTRY OF THE ELECT INTO HEAVEN.**

**Subject.**

The triumphal and joyful entry of the elect into heaven, and the description of their journey from the valley of Josaphat into the eternal kingdom.—*Preached on the feast of St. John Evangelist.*

**Text.**

*Quem diligebat Jesus.*—John xxi. 20.  
"Whom Jesus loved."

**Introduction.**

What happiness for a man to be loved by Jesus, the Son of God! O holy Saint John! even during thy life thou didst enjoy this distinction above the other apostles, for thou wert the disciple "whom Jesus loved." My dear brethren, all of us can have the same good fortune if we are only in the state of sanctifying grace, and love Jesus truly with our whole hearts; for we have His express promise: "I love them that love Me."<sup>1</sup> Greater happiness than this mortal cannot experience—to love God, and to be loved by God. It is in this that the bliss and infinite joy of the elect soul in heaven consists; namely, that for all eternity she shall behold God, love God, and be loved by God, as I shall describe on a future occasion. Yesterday we considered the loving words with which Our Lord shall invite the elect to this happiness on the last day. And what is to follow that invitation? Nothing but the ascent of the elect, body and soul, with

<sup>1</sup> *Ego diligentes me diligo.*—Prov. viii. 17.

## *On the Joyful Entry of the Elect into Heaven.* 99

Our Lord into heaven. This ascent we shall now represent to our mind's eye.

### Plan of Discourse.

*The triumphant and joyful entry of the elect into heaven, and the description of their journey from the valley of Josaphat into the eternal kingdom, such is the whole subject of this meditation.*

That our hearts and desires may be turned away from earthly things to heavenly joys, and that we may be encouraged to love God constantly, such is the end and object of the meditation, to attain which we beg the light and grace we stand in need of from Thee, O Holy Ghost! through the intercession of Mary and of our holy guardian angels.

Man has naturally a great desire to see and know strange and wonderful things, and there are many whose sole pleasure consists in this, so that they sacrifice everything else as long as they can gratify their hankering after novelties. Hence so many dangerous journeys are undertaken by land and sea in order to find out something wonderful and unusual. Many who cannot travel or see those things with their own eyes are delighted to hear or read of them, and love to pore over newspapers and books of travel. Others again are not satisfied with what this earth can afford to gratify their curiosity; they go into the very depths of it to see what it contains, and then mount into the heights of the heavens to consider the courses of the stars and planets; they study and read day and night to find out something new. Most of the old philosophers renounced all their earthly possessions so as to be free from the care which they entail, and devote themselves all the better to their studies and investigations. Some of them had themselves walled up; others crept into caves with the idea of separating themselves from the tumult of the world and from the danger of being disturbed; and although they knew well that they thus risked their health and even life itself, they were not deterred by such considerations; the discovery of new and strange things was to them sweeter than health and life.

Most men are desirous of seeing and knowing new and wonderful things.

Tycho Brahe, one of the most illustrious and richest of the Danish nobles of his time, a young man of great beauty and highly gifted mind, had such a great desire of learning astronomy that he renounced all the privileges and pleasures to which his wealth and nobility entitled him. He built himself a castle

Shown by examples.

on a high mountain, and on the top of it had a lofty tower constructed in which there was a chamber of glass. Here he used to sit with those servants who were necessary to his wants, either for the purpose of bringing him food, or else to help him in his studies. Day and night he spent in looking through his glass to see the courses of the stars; neither the heat of the summer, which must have been greatly intensified by the glass that surrounded his room, nor the cold of winter at such an elevation, could disturb or weary him. Never during the night did he lie down to sleep; only now and then during the day was he perforce obliged to take a few hours' repose; and even then he complained that sleep robbed him of so much precious time that he needed to continue his studies. Thus he spent and wore out his short life, of his own free will robbing himself of all pleasures and recreations, that he might gratify his eagerness to learn all about the heavenly bodies and their movements. It is said of Aristotle, the philosopher, who was so ardent a student of all natural phenomena, that when in spite of all his efforts to understand the ebb and flow of the sea it still remained a mystery to him, he threw himself into the sea in his vexation, and was drowned. So great is man's desire to see and learn novelties.

All the wonders of earth are nothing compared to what the elect shall see.

Christians! what have we to be curious about in this miserable vale of tears? Let us keep our curiosity till the last day, when the divine Judge shall call His chosen flock into the heavenly fold. And what wonderful things we shall behold there even in the first quarter of an hour, if we have the good fortune to be among the elect, and to enter on the possession of eternal joys! As far as possible let us try to picture to ourselves merely the procession and entry of the blessed into heaven. Imagine then that you see an almost infinite number of angels and elect. Of the number of angels Daniel says that there are a thousand times a thousand, and ten thousand times a hundred thousand of them who minister at the throne of God. Of the number of the elect David says that they surpass the sands on the sea-shore: "They shall be multiplied above the sand."<sup>1</sup> St. John says that there is a countless crowd of them: "After this I saw a great multitude, which no man could number."<sup>2</sup> All these glorified bodies, shining like the sun, shall begin to move upwards in the most beautiful order, with Mary, the Queen of heaven, and Jesus

<sup>1</sup> Super arenam multiplicabuntur.—Ps. cxxxviii. 18.

<sup>2</sup> Post hæc vidi turbam magnam, quam dinumerare nemo poterat.—Apoc. vii. 9.



Christ, the King of glory. Let us imagine that all of us here present are in the number; such, O good God! is at all events our hope and desire; and our determination is to serve Thee during the short time of our lives that we may be amongst the elect.

Now the journey begins, and in the first part of it we arrive at the lower regions of the heavens, where the winds and clouds have their dwelling. There we shall see and understand how those most subtile bodies, the winds, have that wonderful and hitherto incomprehensible power of uprooting the strongest trees with their breath, and overthrowing the most massive towers and buildings. Then we shall see where the rainbow gets its marvellous colors; what the dews are made of that fall on the earth in the early morning, to nourish the grass and the flowers; how it happens that when it rains the water comes down in drops from the clouds; how it is that in winter the water descends in the form of white, cold snow, and even in the hottest summer is changed into hail-stones. Then we shall understand what those alarming and fiery bodies are that we now call comets, that wander about the sky with their blazing tails, and fill people with terror and dismay; where the lightning and the thunder come from—all subjects that the wisest men on earth have been puzzling themselves about to no purpose. These and similar things we shall clearly understand in that triumphal procession.

But let us not delay long here. All these things are mere trifles compared to what is still to be exhibited to our eyes when we ascend into a higher region, where the moon performs her revolutions. Is that, we shall exclaim with astonishment, the beautiful light that we looked on on earth merely as a white globe? What a wonderful and huge thing it is! Now, while we look at it, the earth seems as small to us as the moon did formerly; it looks like a child's ball. Now we can see how it is that this vast globe was able to darken the sun in the middle of the day; now we know why the moon changed so often, why it appeared sometimes greater, sometimes less; why we saw sometimes only a half or quarter of it, while at other times the whole orb was visible; why, according to the wind and weather, it changed its color and appearance, being pale or red, troubled or clear. Now we can understand the wonderful influence of this heavenly body on earthly affairs, and why doctors had to attend to it when administering drugs or bleeding their patients, and

When leaving the valley of Josaphat and ascending into the clouds.

In the sphere of the moon.

gardeners in sowing and planting. Oh, how happy would the philosophers of old, who spent their lives studying the moon—how happy would they have been if they had known and seen as much of it as we do now! What do you think, my dear brethren, of the journey we have made so far and in such a short time? And at what distance are we from the valley of Josaphat? If we are to believe mathematicians and astronomers, we are already a hundred and twenty thousand, six hundred and thirty Italian miles, that is, fifty-five thousand, one hundred and eighty-three German miles away from the earth; for such, according to the celebrated mathematician, Christopher Clavius, is the distance of the moon from the earth. But we are still a long way from the region of eternal joys.

In that of  
the sun.

Higher still therefore we must go. The other planets that we meet with on the way, although they are much larger than the moon, we shall merely give a glance at, until we come to the sphere of the sun, a region which is, according to Clavius, nine hundred and sixty-four thousand, three hundred and sixty-one German miles from the earth, for if it were nearer to us, it would scorch us up. Here again we have a pleasant surprise awaiting us in the sight and contemplation of such a vast, swift, and beautiful globe of fire, which in the Holy Scripture is called a bridegroom on account of its beauty, and a giant on account of its size; for the sun is a hundred and sixty-six times greater than the earth. Reason indeed shall we have to admire this wonderful masterpiece of the divine omnipotence, which by its rays forms all the metals in the earth, and gives life and increase to trees, plants, flowers, and herbs. We shall say to ourselves with astonishment: how is it possible that such a mighty body runs its whole course in four and twenty hours, as we now know to be the case by our own daily experience, but without wondering at it, for we know not the extent of the sun's orbit. Those experienced in astronomy tell us that in one hour the sun covers a distance of two hundred and sixty thousand German miles. O infinite power and majesty of God! we shall exclaim; how beautiful and glorious must Thou be in Thyself if a lifeless image of Thee is so glorious and brilliant? Ah, and are we not yet arrived at the place where we shall behold Thee; that place of which Thy servant David said: "The Lord hath built up Sion: and He shall be seen in His glory"? Are we not yet

<sup>1</sup> *Ædificavit Dominus Sion, et videbitur in gloria sua.—Ps. cl. 17.*

there? No, my dear brethren; our journey is not yet finished; there are still many things for us to see.

From the sphere of the sun we ascend into the region of the stars, which is called the firmament, where the fixed stars are that now we can see twinkling pleasantly only during the night. This firmament is at a distance of thirty-eight million, eight hundred and ninety-three thousand and fifty German miles from the earth; so that if an arrow were shot off from here by an impulse such as God alone could give to it, and preserved its original velocity all the way, it would not reach the firmament in less than ninety-two years, supposing it travelled upwards at the rate of two hundred thousand miles an hour; so say astronomers. How we shall gaze and be filled with wonder at the sight of that beautiful sky, so immense in size, and so filled with stars that the Holy Scriptures say they are innumerable; while some of them are thirty-five times greater than the earth, others forty-four times, others seventy-two times, others ninety times, others a hundred and seventy times, and the very smallest eighteen times greater than our earth, although they now appear to us only as small spots of light. Consider, too, how much unoccupied space there is in this vast region; and from that we can form some idea of its immensity. A certain theologian maintains that if God were to turn into a world as large as ours every grain of sand on the sea-shore, those worlds would certainly be innumerable, but even then there would not be enough of them to fill up the heavens. We shall have ocular proof of this when, as we hope, we shall all be on our way together to the city of God; and when we reach that part of our journey we shall almost think in our joy and wonderment that we have already arrived at heaven.

In the  
firmament  
among the  
stars.

Let us now stand still a moment and cast a last glance at the place we have come from, the earth. Oh, what a deep abyss! we shall exclaim; and where is the world we lived on during our lives? Where is Europe, that celebrated continent, that was formerly divided into so many kingdoms, duchies, and principalities, for the possession of which so many sovereigns shed torrents of blood and spent years in strife? Where is the town of Treves in which we lived so long? Where is the house in which I passed my life? Ah, we can see nothing of it all! And is that the earth? What a little spot it is compared to the vast place in which we are! It seems no greater than the head of a

From  
which the  
earth is  
scarcely  
visible.

pin! Oh, what a poor, miserable dwelling we had! In what wretched holes we lived! Good-bye, world! thou art not worth looking at any longer; we have something better to see here. Let us hasten on to the city of God! Are we not there yet? No, incredible as it may seem, we have not yet accomplished the half of our journey; for the firmament where the stars are is as far from the dwelling of the blessed as it is from the earth; and thus from the computations of astronomers we find that if a man were to travel every day eight hundred miles upward from the earth, he could not arrive in heaven under less than eight thousand years. Nay, the distance is so great that all the mathematicians are at fault, and they candidly acknowledge that all their investigations are not enough to enable them to measure the height of heaven. Nevertheless we shall accomplish our journey with the utmost celerity, and without fatigue.

They shall see far more wonderful things in the fore-courts of heaven.

And thus we come to another heaven called the crystalline. The learned are not agreed as to the matter of which this sphere is formed, but that does not concern us; whatever it be made of, we know that it must be most beautiful, and that it far surpasses all the inferior heavens in brilliancy and glory; for it is nearer to the place of eternal joys, and is, as it were, the first floor, the foundation on which the city of God is built. At last, after having travelled many millions of miles, we arrive at the fore-court of the heaven we so desire, and for which the Prophet David sighed so ardently: "How lovely are Thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts: my soul longeth and fainteth for the courts of the Lord. For better is one day in Thy courts above thousands;"<sup>1</sup> one day there is better than a thousand spent in the pleasures of this world. What a wonderful place! we shall exclaim; we have seen nothing, as it were, till now. Oh, how beautiful and magnificent heaven itself must be if the vestibule to it is so grand! What must not the city of God itself be, since its very foundations are so magnificent? If the place that we now have under our feet, and that we regard only as the hut of a poor peasant, is so splendidly appointed, what must be the edifice in which we shall live with God forever?

Until they come at length to heaven

Rejoice, dear souls! Lift up your eyes! Look! we are close to it now; there is the heaven of heavens which on account of its brightness is called the empyrean heaven! There is the place

<sup>1</sup> Quam dilecta tabernacula tua Domine virtutem : concupiscit et deficit anima mea in atria Domini. Quia melior est dies una in atris tuis super millia.—Ps. cixxiii. 2, 3, 11.

## *On the Joyful Entry of the Elect into Heaven.* 105

of rest for which we sighed so eagerly when on earth. There is our eternal fatherland at which we, formerly poor pilgrims in the vale of tears, have arrived. This is the heaven that God has made as the dwelling-place of His elect; this is the residence of the sovereign Monarch, the court of the King of kings, the palace of the Eternal Father, the temple of His infinite majesty, the heavenly paradise, the place of joys! O heaven! who will give us words and thoughts to describe thy vastness and immensity, thy beauty and glory! When St. Fulgentius saw the city of Rome for the first time, and remarked the number of beautiful buildings that adorn it, he cried out in astonishment: Oh, how magnificent must not be the heavenly Jerusalem, that God Himself has built as a dwelling of joy for Himself and His elect! Ah, palaces and buildings of the kings of this earth! why should I speak of you? You are only miserable huts compared to heaven! But here our words and ideas are at fault, for as the Apostle says, no eye has seen, nor can heart conceive what delights God has prepared in His kingdom for those who love Him truly.

St. John in the Apocalypse gives some sort of an idea of the glory of the kingdom of heaven. I was, he says, taken up in spirit by an angel, and "he showed me the holy city Jerusalem. And the building of the wall thereof was of jasper-stone; but the city itself pure gold, like to clear glass. And the foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with all manner of precious stones. And the twelve gates are twelve pearls, . . . and the street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass. And the city hath no need of the sun, nor of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God hath enlightened it, and the Lamb is the lamp thereof."<sup>1</sup> But, my dear brethren, let St. John say what he pleases about this city and its gold, and crystal, and precious stones, and pearls; he has only given us a poor idea, a most inadequate sketch of it taken from what we look on as most precious on earth; but he is still a long way from the exact truth. We cannot form any picture of it in our minds until we have accomplished the long journey and seen it ourselves in its beau-

itself, the home of the blessed, the beauty of which is indescribable.

It is inadequately described by St. John.

<sup>1</sup> Et ostendit mihi civitatem sanctam Jerusalem. Erat structura muri ejus ex lapide jaspide, ipsa vero civitas aurum mundum simile vitro mundo. Fundamenta muri civitatis omni lapide pretioso ornata. Et duodecim portæ duodecim margaritæ sunt; . . . et platea civitatis aurum mundum tanquam vitrum perlucidum. Et civitas non eget sole, neque luna ut luceant in ea; nam claritas Dei illuminavit eam, et lucerna ejus est Agnus.—Apoc. xxi. 10, 18, 19, 21, 23.

ty and glory; it will be the city of the endless joys and glory of the almighty God. Into this city of beauty and delight then we shall make our triumphal entry with Jesus Christ. "Lift up your gates, O ye princes! and be ye lifted up, O eternal gates! and the King of glory shall enter in" with His chosen flock. Then we shall be led before the throne of the Eternal Father, and a place shall be appointed for each one according to his merits. "And so shall we be always with the Lord," as the Apostle says, and rejoice with Him forever. O joy! O exultation! O infinite delight! I can no further picture to myself what thou art!

Folly of  
man in  
loving  
earthly  
things and  
forgetting  
heaven.

Ah, I am forced to exclaim, with my holy Father Ignatius, as a consequence of this meditation, "how vile the earth seems to me when I look up to heaven," and consider the eternal dwelling of the elect. Poor mortals that we are in this vale of tears! We crawl about like ants in a heap of mud, and moil and toil for a handful of earth, and think so little of our heavenly country! "How ridiculous are the bounds of mortals!" such are the terms in which even the heathen philosopher Seneca laughs at our vain cares and occupations. Do you know where you are, and for what you are working so hard? You are on the earth; and even if you made the whole of it your own, what better would you be? It is only a little point when compared to the heavenly sphere. Yet this point is divided amongst the people by fire and sword; for the sake of it we fight with each other, and are ready to tear one another to pieces for a garden, or farm, or vineyard, or piece of ground. We go to law for a hand's breadth of land, or a handful of clay, as if all heaven depended on it, and meanwhile we forget heaven completely. On this little point we strut about and are puffed up with pride, and try to make ourselves great people. In this place of wretchedness we allow ourselves to be befooled by mortal beauty, so that to possess it we renounce all the beauty we could see and enjoy hereafter in heaven. For this handful of earth, this empty smoke, we so often sell the place of everlasting joy. If there is question of choosing between a piece of money and heaven; between the point of honor and heaven; between a momentary pleasure,

<sup>1</sup> Attollite portas principes vestras, et elevamini portae aeternales, et introibit rex glorie.—Ps. xxiii. 7.

<sup>2</sup> Et sic semper cum Domino erimus.—I. Thess. iv. 16.

<sup>3</sup> Quam sordet mihi terra, dum cælum aspicio.

<sup>4</sup> Quam ridiculi sunt mortallum termini!

the love and society of a creature, and heaven; between revenge and anger, and heaven; away with heaven, we say, as often as we sin; the gold, the honor, the pleasure, that person, vengeance, and self-gratification are dearer to me. O blind mortals that we are! "Glorious things are said of thee, O city of God;"<sup>1</sup> but fool that I am, I think so little of thee that I often barter thee for a most wretched thing!

Ah, dear Christians, we have now made that joyful journey to the heavenly paradise only in imagination; ah, let us live so during the short time that still remains to us in this vale of tears, and so serve the great God, that what we have been imagining may be one day realized, and that we may make that triumphal entry together into the city of God! We are still on earth and many millions of miles away from our eternal dwelling; but let us lift up our hearts and desires thither daily. "Let us look at the heavens," says St. Chrysostom, "when there is no cloud in our way, and the whole sky is clear and bright, and let us remain a while in the contemplation of its beauty."<sup>2</sup> Look at the sky when it is clear, either by day when the sun is shining, or by night when the stars are twinkling, or between day and night, when we can see the morning aurora or the evening twilight. Can anything be more beautiful? Is there any palace on earth to be compared with it? Gold, silver, precious stones are as nothing before it. Let us remain a while in the contemplation of this beautiful object, and say then to ourselves: still this is not heaven, but only the footstool of God and His saints. And then we can go farther in thought, and say: if the vestibule, the footstool is so grand, what must be the beauty and magnificence of the dwelling itself? How glorious must be the home of the angels, of the Blessed Virgin, of Our Lord Himself? How splendid the throne on which is seated the supreme majesty of God? Whenever we say "Our Father, who art in heaven," let us recall to our minds with a lively faith that place of joy where our heavenly Father reigns in glory awaiting His children, and that recollection will detach our hearts more and more from the insipid things of earth, and urge us to be more zealous in the divine service. "Thy kingdom come!" Let us say these words to ourselves with a sigh of holy desire. Ah, would we

Conclusion  
and exhortation  
often  
to think of  
heaven.

<sup>1</sup> *Gloriosa dicta sunt de te, civitas Dei.*—Ps. lxxxvi. 3.

<sup>2</sup> *Suspiciamus coelum, quando nulla se interponit nubes, et clara est omnis ejus corona: deinde ad pulchritudinem aspectus ejus aliquantulum temporis perduremus.*—St. Chrys. in Heb. 3. Hom. 6.

were there! When will the wished-for hour come when I shall ascend thither? "My soul longeth and fainteth for the courts of the Lord."

And to de-  
spise every-  
thing on  
earth, that  
we may one  
day ascend  
into heaven.

Farewell, O earth! Thou hast nothing which can satisfy me; my desires are centred in heaven! Eyes, why should you stare any more at the creatures of this nether world? What you behold here is only vanity. Mortify yourselves now, and put a slight check on your curiosity; there, in the country to which we are travelling, you shall have more beautiful and pleasant things to admire. O my God! let me only arrive there; let me not be excluded from that dwelling; anything else, no matter how hard and difficult it may be, I readily submit to, if at the end I can only be an inhabitant of Thy house and heavenly palace! Let me be poor for a time; it does not matter. Rich ladies and gentlemen of the world! I do not envy you; if I only get to heaven I shall be wealthy enough! Let me be for a time the lowliest and most despicable of men; what matters it? I do not grudge others the honors they enjoy, provided only I get to heaven. Let me be troubled and oppressed here for a time; O worldlings! I do not envy you your pleasures; it is all nothing to me if I only get to heaven. Let me be sick and suffering for a time; it matters not if I only get to heaven. Let all those in whom I have hitherto placed my affections die prematurely, it matters not; I congratulate you, dear children and friends, who have been taken from me by death, if you are with God in heaven, and if I can see you there one day! For once for all I have resolved that I will go to heaven; I will be with that blessed company which is one day to ascend body and soul in triumph into paradise, and therefore I will serve my God truly, constantly, and with all my strength. Meanwhile before that happy time comes, and as long as I am in this vale of tears, I shall rejoice in the remembrance of thee, O blissful city of God! and with St. Augustine I will say to thee: O heaven! with pleasure do I speak of thee, hear about thee, write and read about thee! Thou art my comfort in sorrow, an alleviation to my pains, an encouragement in difficulties, strength in temptations to sin, hope in sadness, the reward of my labor, the end and object of all my desires. For thee alone do I sigh, thee alone do I desire, in thee alone do I find joy, until my wish shall be fulfilled and I see thee with my own eyes and in thee the God of my love, and rejoice with all the elect forever. Amen.



*On the Joyful Entry of the Elect into Heaven.* 109

*Another introduction to the same sermon for the second  
Sunday of Advent.*

**Text.**

*Mortui resurgunt.*—Matt. xi. 5.

“The dead rise again.”

**Introduction.**

The dead rise again? Yes. If that is ever by a miracle the case on earth, they come to life indeed, but it is only to die again. “The dead rise again.” When this happens to us all on the last day, we shall rise to eternal life or to eternal torments. We have already considered the twofold sentence. “Depart from Me, you cursed,” shall be said to the wicked; “Come, ye blessed of My Father,” shall be the sentence pronounced on the just. The latter is joyful as the former is terrible, as we have seen already. The execution of the former we have taken as the subject of one of our meditations: “And these shall go into everlasting punishment.”<sup>1</sup> “But the just into life everlasting.”<sup>2</sup> This latter we shall now consider. *Plan of discourse as above.*

<sup>1</sup> *Ibunt hi in supplicium æternum.*—Matt. xxv. 46.

<sup>2</sup> *Iusti autem in vitam æternam.*—*Ibid.*

# ON THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN.

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## *FORTY-SEVENTH SERMON.*

### ON THE JOY THAT THE ELECT SHALL HAVE IN HEAVEN OUTSIDE OF GOD.

#### Subject.

The souls of the elect shall be filled with joy, even from what they shall possess outside of God.—*Preached on the feast of the Apostles SS. Philip and James.*

#### Text.

*Non turbetur cor vestrum; in domo Patris mei mansiones multæ sunt.*—John xiv. 1, 2.

“Let not your heart be troubled; in My Father’s house there are many mansions.”

#### Introduction.

And why, O Lord! should we not be troubled? How could we feel glad or cheerful in this sorrowful vale of tears, in the midst of dangers and calamities, and at such a distance from our eternal country, for which we must constantly sigh and yearn? Yes, says Our Lord; even here you must put away all sadness out of your hearts; you, I mean, My faithful servants, who always try to do My Father’s will: “Let not your heart be troubled;” for remember what joy is prepared for you after this short life. “In My Father’s house there are many mansions,” and now I am going there to prepare a place for you. Have patience only for a little while: “I will come again, and will take you to Myself, that where I am you also may be,” namely, in the joys of heaven. With the hope and expectation of this future happiness you can rejoice even while you are in

this world of sorrow. My dear brethren, St. John Chrysostom, considering the words of the Apostle, "Rejoice in the Lord always: again, I say, rejoice,"<sup>1</sup> makes this remark quite appositely to our subject: "But if here on earth, where there is sickness, disturbance, premature death, persecution, envy, anger, ceaseless plotting, daily care and trouble, and one misfortune after the other to afflict us: if even here Paul tells us that we must always rejoice, what will it be when we have left this earth, when we shall be freed from all evil, and shall have exchanged the vale of tears for the city of God, the kingdom of heaven?" Yes; truly, great Saint! well may you ask what sort of joy shall we have! Ah, if you could only describe it to us and explain it to us! Here I could wish to have for one hour the knowledge that St. Paul had of the joys of heaven, which he saw when he was rapt to the third heaven. But the wish is vain; if I had the knowledge I should not dare to reveal anything of it any more than St. Paul did. Faith alone should and must be enough for us; and it tells us that the joy of the elect in heaven is incomprehensibly great, because heaven is the place of all imaginable delights, both of soul and body. We shall begin to-day by considering the happiness of the soul, since that is the nobler part, and shall make what use we may of what the holy doctors of the Church, specially enlightened by God, and the Holy Scriptures teach on the subject. I say then:

#### Plan of Discourse.

*The souls of the elect shall be filled with joy, even from what they shall possess outside of God. Such is the whole subject. Let us serve God with all our soul and all our strength, that we may possess this joy forever, such should be the conclusion made by each one of us.*

Help us hereto, O Creator of all joys! through the intercession of Mary, the Queen of heaven, and of our holy guardian angels.

The soul of man consists of three powers, namely, the memory, the understanding, and the reasoning will. By the memory it recalls past things; by the understanding it knows and grasps what it sees and is conscious of in the present; and by the will it desires or fears, loves or hates, feels sorrow or joy. Now if all these powers have a consoling and pleasant object presented to them, the whole soul is completely happy. And that it is

Every faculty of the soul shall be filled with joy in heaven.

<sup>1</sup> *Gaudete in Domino semper: iterum dico, gaudete.*—Philipp. iv. 4.

which makes the perfect happiness of the soul in heaven for all eternity, even outside the good it possesses in God, the Fountain of infinite happiness. All that it remembers outside of God, all that it knows and grasps outside of God, all that it wishes and desires outside of God will cause it unspeakable joy and pleasure.

The memory shall rejoice in the recollection of the dangers incurred on earth. Shown by a simile.

With regard to the memory, it can rejoice even at the recollection of sad events. Thus a soldier who has escaped out of a bloody battle, in which the greater number of his comrades were left dead on the field, and who has returned victorious after long fighting, has reason to rejoice whenever his thoughts go back to the danger in which he was, and in which so many lost their lives, and to the good fortune he now enjoys. How lucky I am, he says to himself; I am among the few who have saved their lives and won the victory. And the greater the danger, the greater must be his joy at having escaped. My dear brethren, as long as we are in this mortal life on earth we are soldiers engaged in battle, and we have to defend ourselves amid blows and cuts, and are still uncertain as to whether we shall escape or not. On all sides we are surrounded by powerful foes, and if they get the better of us we shall have to suffer an eternal death. "We have to fight," says St. Cyprian, "with avarice, impurity, ambition, and impatience," which try to lead us into sin. Our most bitter and invisible enemies are the demons and their satellites, who lie in wait for our souls night and day. And what should occasion us the greatest alarm, our faith teaches us that the greater number of men succumb in the struggle and are lost forever; and that the smaller number gain the victory and eternal life (although the number of the elect is countless, still it is small compared to that of the reprobate). Hence if you ask those who are really desirous of saving their souls and serving God truly with all their hearts, what it is that occasions them most anguish, they will tell you that they are terrified most at knowing that they are always in danger of offending God, whom they love above all things, and losing their souls, which they are most eager to save. For that reason hermits seek the deserts and wildernesses, and religious love their cloisters and convents, because there they are more safe from that danger; therefore they sigh with St. Paul: "To me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain."<sup>1</sup> I would willingly serve Christ till the end

<sup>1</sup> *Mihi vivere Christus est, et mori lucrum.* — Philipp. i. 21.

of my life, but since I am exposed to so many dangers of losing Him, I look on death as a gain, because it will place me in safety where I can never lose Him again.

How great then must not be the consolation and joy of the soul that, freed from all dangers, finds itself in safety, when it remembers its former condition? That very remembrance will make the elect soul eternally happy; it will recall all the temptations with which it was assailed during life, and that it resisted by the grace of God; all the occasions of sin in which it was and from which it escaped; all the dangers in which it should have fallen if it had not been protected by God's special grace and the help of its holy guardian angel; all its past, even mortal sins, for which it did penance and which were thus blotted out. O my God! it will say; how easily I might have been lost forever! In that house, that company, that garden, in those allurements, that occasion, that violent temptation, how near I was to losing Thy grace! If death had come to me when I was in the state of sin I should now be in the fire of hell. How many thousand others have fallen, and shamefully fallen in the same temptations, occasions, and in far less dangers, and they are now with the demons in hell? Ah, how easily that might have been my fate too! Infinite thanks to Thee, God of mercy! the danger is now over; I have happily escaped it; with the happy few of the elect I have won the game. Eternal fire of hell, I fear thee no longer! Unhappy eternity, thou art no more a source of dread to me; I am in heaven! Now I am no longer in uncertainty as to whether I shall fall or not; there is no weakness in me now that can succumb to difficulties; no evil inclination that can dare to allure me to offend the God of my love; now I am sure that I shall never lose Him. There, in the abyss of hell, are burning many millions, and I am in heaven, and shall be there forever! Oh, what an incomprehensible joy this recollection brings with it! Imagine, my dear brethren, that we are already with the blessed in heaven in the place of safety; what a consolation it must be for us to look back on those things as the elect do?

From which the soul is now saved and placed in eternal security.

This joy will be increased by another recollection calculated to comfort and console; for during all eternity the soul shall be mindful of all the benefits, general and particular, spiritual and corporal, that it received from the hands of God during life; and it will recall the wonderful secret ways and means by which Divine Providence led it to its last end. God, it will say, has

In the recollection of the graces received from God.

caused me, in preference to so many millions of men, to be born and bred in a Catholic country of Catholic parents. Oh, what a great grace this is! If I had been born among heathens or Turks, or of heretical parents, how would it have been with me? I should have led as bad a life in unbelief as others, and have died as they did, and of course I should now be in hell as they are; but I am in heaven! From my earliest years God gave me a tender devotion and love towards His Blessed Mother Mary, from whose hand I have received so many graces; by the help and favor of that Mother I have been enabled to die a happy death and to gain eternal happiness. When I heard that sermon at which I was present by chance, or read that spiritual book that happened to fall into my hands, I received that light and knowledge. If my good angel had not taken care of me, I should have persisted in my ignorance, tepidity, and carelessness of my salvation, and in the wickedness and vices to which I was growing accustomed; that knowledge was the beginning of my reform, and of the good life I led afterwards; from that time I regularly heard the word of God by which I was encouraged to good, strengthened against temptations, and kept in the state of grace. Now I am in heaven!

Of difficulties overcome.

God has often by a special grace visited me with crosses and trials, by which He led me on the way that all His elect must travel, and made me follow the example of His crucified Son. At first it was hard for me; but, O good cross! how beneficial thou wert to me afterwards; if I had been freed from thee, I should, like so many others, have gone astray on the broad road that leads to eternal ruin! Golden poverty to which Divine Providence brought me, how salutary thou wert for me! If I had been rich, the vain world would have counted me in the number of its children, and I should not have found any place among Thy elect. The want of temporal goods taught me to be humble, to fly idleness as the root of many sins, and to raise my heart and desires to heavenly things. Desirable sickness and bodily pains with which God visited me at that time, what great merit you have brought me! If I had been always strong and healthy, I should have often been in dangerous occasions of sin. That illness lessened my bodily strength, and kept the wanton flesh under control. Happy contempt and persecution that I had to suffer from men, how advantageous you were to me! You taught me not to depend on the world, but to place all my trust

in my Creator alone. Dear sorrow and desolation, that I had to suffer when husband, wife, father, mother, dearest child was taken from me by a premature death! Ah, what do I not owe you! Then I learned to know the inconstancy and transitory nature of all earthly joys and comforts, and how to resign myself humbly and contentedly in all things to the will of God, and then too I was able to say from my heart: "Our Father, who art in heaven, Thy will be done!" All these troubles and difficulties have been happily overcome; they are now vanished forever, and I am in possession of eternal joys! Now I shall praise and extol for all eternity the great mercy and manifold graces that the Lord showed me: "The mercies of the Lord I will sing forever."<sup>1</sup> Oh, truly joyful, my dear brethren, are the memories that occur to the blessed in heaven! What could be more consoling?

Still there is another thing that increases this joy of the memory; it is the recollection of the good works and merits that the elect amassed during life, for which they now receive such an exceeding great reward in eternity. O my God! they will think, I am in heaven, and what have I done to get here? I have not shed my blood, nor endured pains and torments like the holy martyrs who rejoice with me in glory; I have not labored to that end till the last day; how is it that such a great reward has fallen to me? Oh, how little I have done for it! A few years ago, while I was still on earth, I began to serve Thee, my God, and to keep Thy commandments, none of which after that I ever transgressed grievously; and while engaged in Thy service, under Thy sweet yoke I enjoyed the utmost peace and comfort of mind, and a repose of conscience that I would not have exchanged for any pleasure in the world. And is that all I did? Yes; that is all. And on account of it I am now in the glory of my Lord! So little have I paid for heaven! I have often sinned, and afterwards sincerely repented and tried to be all the more zealous in the performance of good works in order to make some atonement for the insults I offered Thee; and for that I now receive as a reward an ocean of delights! I have for God's sake practised a little mortification in rising in the morning, I have spent half an hour in devotion, said my morning prayers (the words I used to say with assembled people during my life are still ringing in my ears: "All for the honor and glory of God"), I directed my

Of the  
good works  
done during  
life.

<sup>1</sup> *Misericordias Domini in eternum cantabo.—Ps. lxxxviii. 1.*

daily duties to the honor of God by the good intention, etc.; is it possible that these things have gained for me so many happy eternities as I see to be actually the case? Hearing holy Mass daily, saying the rosary, making the evening examen of conscience, going to confession and Communion every week or fortnight, observing the fasts and abstinences prescribed by the Church, giving a small alms now and then to the poor according to my means, visiting the sick and attending on them occasionally, mortifying my outward senses, overcoming human respect, avoiding dangerous company, meekly bearing the faults and failings of others, forgiving those who have injured me, being a little zealous in leading to God those under my care: these things are the seed that I sowed during my life-time; for they are all the good I remember doing; and an eternal, immortal, divine glory is the fruit I gather from them now in heaven!

For which  
an eternal  
reward is  
now to be  
received.

O my God! I imagine that all these works are worth nothing or very little, and I should consider myself as more than fortunate if they gained for me the very lowest place in Thy kingdom; but now I hear Thee saying: "Friend, go up higher."<sup>1</sup> My dear child, a greater degree of glory is yours! Now I must acknowledge that to be true which I formerly read in Thy Holy Scripture, but did not then understand: "Behold with your eyes how I have labored a little, and have found much rest to myself."<sup>2</sup> Truly, O my God! only for a short time and very little have I labored; and for that I have found eternal rest! Now, O holy St. Paul! my companion in everlasting joys, now do I indeed realize the truth of thy words: "For I reckon that the sufferings of this time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come that shall be revealed in us."<sup>3</sup> All that we do during our lives, all that we suffer and endure, is nothing compared to the glory that awaits us as a reward for it in eternity. Yes; now I know by experience how little I have done. How great and superabundant are the joy and glory in which I now reign forever! Alleluia! O God of my love! eternal thanks and praise to Thee! There, my dear brethren, you have a slight sketch of joys of memory that shall be ours unchangeably for all eternity in the kingdom of heaven, even without counting what we shall pos-

<sup>1</sup> *Amice, ascende superius.*—Luke xiv. 10.

<sup>2</sup> *Videte oculis vestris quia modicum laboravi, et inveni mihi multam requiem.*—Ecclesi. ii. 36.

<sup>3</sup> *Existimo enim quod non sunt condignæ passionēs hujus temporis ad futuram gloriā, quæ revelabitur in nobis.*—Rom. viii. 18.



ness in God Himself if we shall only have the happiness of being in the number of the elect.

With regard to the understanding, it has its greatest and highest pleasure in the knowledge of those things that it wishes to know and understand; a desire of knowledge, as we have seen already, that has induced many to renounce all their possessions, to sacrifice their repose and comfort, their health, and even life itself, that they might devote themselves altogether to the study and investigation of interesting facts with which they were after all only dimly acquainted. Have a little patience, curious souls! in heaven your desire for knowledge shall be fully satisfied. Besides what we have seen with our bodily eyes in the triumphant procession from the valley of Josaphat to the city of God, oh, what new and beautiful objects shall be offered to our minds to know and clearly understand when we shall be together in the heavenly Jerusalem! And in the first place we shall understand those truths that are now incomprehensible to our minds, and that the brightest intellects have in vain tried to master; truths that would never have occurred to us as possible even, if faith had not suggested them to us. Then we shall understand the mystery of the resurrection of the dead, and how the same body, this very flesh of ours, after having decayed in the earth and been eaten by worms, after the bones have crumbled away into dust and been converted into earth,—how the same flesh shall rise in its integrity and become alive again as it was before. We shall see and experience how these bodies of ours, that are now so gross, shall after having been glorified be able to pass through the hardest stone, steel, and iron without trouble, and without leaving behind the slightest trace of their passage; and how they shall be able to accomplish in a moment, if we only wish, the immense journey between heaven and earth, just as we now ascend in thought into heaven and come back to earth again in a moment. We shall understand the wonderful power of the fire of hell, and how the souls and bodies that are confined therein burn forever without being consumed. We shall know and clearly understand all the interpretation of the Holy Scriptures, all the prophecies contained therein, all the mysteries of the incarnation, birth, passion, and death of Our Lord, the oft-repeated and still existing incomprehensible mystery of the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar: how, namely, the whole of Our Lord's humanity is completely present in every particle of the elements in vir-

The mind shall be filled with joy in understanding all the mysteries of the faith.

ture of the words of the priest, and present at the same time in countless different parts of the world, without being multiplied, and received by us in the shape of our natural food without being dissolved in the stomach. We shall understand (but not fully comprehend) the great mystery of the Most Blessed Trinity; how the Son is generated by the Father from all eternity, and shall be so generated for all eternity, although the Father is not before the Son; how the Holy Ghost proceeds from the Father and the Son, and how these three distinct Persons are but one God. It was a sublime knowledge of this kind that made David cry out rejoicing beforehand in spirit: "I studied that I might know this thing; it is a labor in my sight;" all my investigations result in nothing; I cannot understand it "until I go into the sanctuary of God."<sup>1</sup> I must wait till then, and I shall understand everything. A single small ray, the merest spark of infused knowledge (although it is in no way to be compared to the light of glory by which we shall see God face to face), wonderfully illuminated the mind and intellect of a weak woman, St. Theresa. A similar ray enlightened St. Ignatius Loyola, a soldier accustomed to the use of the sword, but not at all to the pen. And what have not the apostles done with a single spark of this light that they received from the Holy Ghost? Oh, what shall not then be disclosed to us, what shall we not learn in the kingdom of heaven when we shall see God clearly as He is in Himself? This should be to us as great a source of joy as it was to David.

And in having all natural knowledge.

Again, the mind shall fully grasp and understand all the natural knowledge, all the qualities, powers, virtues, and efficacy of all creatures that have ever been created by God from the beginning of the world. No matter what I may now learn and know in this life of the arts and sciences, or how profound my knowledge may be, there must still be an infinite number of things that I know nothing about. For while studying one science, I forget or lessen the knowledge I have of another that I learned formerly. The influence of things present, and the images we form of them often destroy altogether the memory of past events. But at the first sight of God, the Source of all truth, knowledge, and science, I shall understand and know more than all the most learned theologians on earth ever knew, although they devoted

<sup>1</sup> *Existimabam ut cognoscerem hoc, labor est ante me. Donec intrem in sanctuarium Dei.*  
—Ps. lxxii. 16, 17.

their lives to study; I shall understand and know more than all philosophers, naturalists, astronomers, and geographers; in a word, more than all the scientists of the whole world. Now, in spite of the long time we devote to study, how little we are able to know thoroughly! We see the earth, the trees, the herbs with our eyes, but we rarely have a thorough knowledge of their nature. Philosophers and doctors have been disputing with each other up to the present day, and their dispute continues still whenever there is question of deciding in what consists the "continuum," that is, for instance, the length and breadth of a finger; and they are bound to acknowledge that up to this no one has advanced a sound theory on the matter. So dark is our understanding in spite of our craving for knowledge. But in the place of eternal joys the full light shall shine on the mind, and it will know and understand in its first sight of God all that it can ever wish to know and understand: all history, from the beginning to the end of the world, of all peoples, times, and individuals. There are still living and shall live till the end of the world two renowned men, one of whom is not less than two thousand four hundred and ninety years old, the Prophet Elias; the other is still older and has reached the age of five thousand three hundred and fifty years, that is Enoch. Imagine those two men coming into the city of Treves; what an immense rush there would be to see and speak to them! What a treat it would be to hear Elias describing the character of King Achab, with whom he had to deal, and the fierce anger of Jezabel, from whom he was forced to fly! What delight it would cause to hear how and why he made fire to fall from heaven on the soldiers who had come to bring him before the king! how food was brought him by the raven! what was the taste of the hearth-cake on which he was able to subsist without any other food for forty days, and to walk up to the mountain of God! How interesting it would be to hear Enoch describing the size and appearance of Adam and Eve, our first parents, with whom he lived for more than two hundred years! to hear his description of the deluge, which he witnessed, and how and where he was saved from it by the Almighty! What pleasure it would give us to learn all about the various changes of dynasties and the great events in the history of the world that they saw! And yet they could not tell us that they saw how the earth, or sky, or the stars, or the light, or the elements were made. Yet it would interest us very much to hear

them describe what they do know by experience. Nay, we look on it as a great affair to get news from Spain, Italy, France, or any corner of the world; and there are some so curious in this respect that they prefer to go without their meals rather than lose the latest news, although we know very well that such news is often a mere fabrication; yet it pleases us to gratify our curiosity and to be able to talk about what is going on in the world. Oh, how great then will be the delight and pleasure of the mind in the kingdom of heaven, when all history shall be clear and evident to us as well as all science without bewildering us with multiplicity or confusing us with the vast variety of subjects! Oh, Christian faith, provided thou art kept alive by good works, what a great reward awaits thee in heaven!

The will shall be filled with joy in the possession of all imaginable goods.

There is still another faculty of the soul, the will, which is the proper seat of joy; this too shall be filled to overflowing with delights, and shall swim in an ocean of pleasure. The human will enjoys complete felicity and perfect pleasure when it has all it desires, and in the way in which it desires. To no purpose should we seek such happiness in this vale of tears; here we have no joy without care and trouble; nor has there ever been a man since the world was made who always had all his desires satisfied; even that most fortunate of kings, Solomon, in the midst of his riches, honors, and carnal pleasures, complained in the bitterness of his heart. If we are not wanting in one thing we are in another; and if we sometimes taste a little pleasure, it lasts a very short time, or otherwise we get disgusted with it. If there is any one on earth who has all he wishes and as he wishes, it is in my opinion the man who wills what God wills, and neither wishes nor desires anything but what God wills. Heaven of joys! thou art the city of rest, in which every wish and desire of the will shall be completely fulfilled and satisfied for all eternity! "But as for me, I will appear before Thy sight in justice: I shall be satisfied when Thy glory shall appear."<sup>1</sup> Such are the words in which David expresses his joy at the thought of heaven. Here on a royal throne, in the midst of treasures and riches, and all the delights of sense, I am only a poor beggar; it is only hereafter that my hunger shall be fully appeased. Truly, "I shall be satisfied;" in heaven I shall have everything I wish for, and as long as I wish to have it; nor will satiety cause me disgust, or weariness, or

<sup>1</sup> Ego autem in justitia apparebo conspectui tuo: satlabor cum apparuerit gloria tua.—Ps. xvi. 15.

aversion; after ten thousand, a hundred thousand, a thousand times a thousand years, my pleasure and joy shall be just as fresh, just as agreeable as at the very first moment of my entry into heaven. "I shall be satisfied when Thy glory shall appear!" My memory, my understanding, my will, my whole soul shall be filled with joy; all that I shall there remember, all that I shall know and understand, all that I shall wish and desire shall fill me with delight, and my joy no man shall take from me.

My dear brethren, if there were no other joy to expect in heaven but that which the human soul experiences, as we have been meditating (although that is after all only a small matter when compared to the happiness that results from the vision of God). would it not be well worth our while to work hard for it even till the last day? And could any good work seem too difficult to us, when we consider the glory and happiness it will bring us in heaven? Or could any one say that the commandments of God are too hard to keep when we know that the faithful observance of them will open to us heaven with all its joys? Eh! "The sufferings of this time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come that shall be revealed in us;"<sup>1</sup> no pain, or labor, or trouble of this short time is worthy of being named when we consider the future glory that is promised us for it. Therefore let us with King David make this resolution: "I have inclined my heart to do Thy justifications forever, for the reward."<sup>2</sup> My heart, O God! is like a pair of scales; if I put on one side the eternal reward and the unspeakable joys of the memory, understanding, and will, and on the other all the good works, mortifications, acts of self-denial, troubles, and adversities of this life, the latter would be lifted up as if filled with nothing but feathers. Therefore I will incline my heart to do Thy justifications forever, for the reward.

The consideration of this joy should make us think lightly of all difficulties.

Yes, O my God! most generous in Thy rewards for good works, such is my firm resolve! No time shall seem too long for me to spend serving Thee zealously so long as I receive the promised reward, even if I have to wait many hundred years for it. Now I will amass a treasury of good works and merits, the remembrance of which shall be a source of joy to me for all eternity; now I humbly submit my understanding to the service of the

Conclusion to serve God with our whole hearts.

<sup>1</sup> Non sunt dignæ passionēs hujus temporis ad futuram gloriā quæ revelabitur in nobis.—Rom. viii. 18.

<sup>2</sup> Inclinaui cor meum ad faciendās justificationes tuas in æternum: propter retributionem.—Ps. cxviii. 112.

faith; with the Apostle I desire to know nothing but Jesus Christ, my crucified Saviour; hereafter my mind shall rejoice in Thy kingdom in all sorts of knowledge. Now I resign my will to Thy most holy will; I leave my fate and fortunes in Thy fatherly hands, ready and willing to do, to omit, to suffer whatever, how, when, and as long as it pleases Thee; to this I make no exception; I do not desire to live or to die in any other way but as it pleases Thee, my God. Hereafter when I come to Thee in heaven, as I hope with child-like confidence, and as I most ardently desire, Thou wilt give me everything as I wish to have it, and that for all eternity. Amen.

*Another introduction to the same sermon for the third Sunday of Advent.*

#### Text.

*Gaudete in Domino semper, iterum dico: gaudete.*—Philipp. iv. 4.

“Rejoice in the Lord always: again, I say, rejoice.”

#### Introduction.

But, holy apostle, how can we always rejoice? This exhortation thou gavest to thy Christians who were still alive on this earth. But how should or could we follow it in this sorrowful vale of tears, where we are at such a distance from our heavenly country, in which we are surrounded on all sides by misery, crosses, and trials, so that our whole life is made up of mourning and lamentation? Nevertheless, says the Apostle, “again I say, rejoice.” My dear brothers and sisters, I allude to you who serve the Lord and try to do His will in all things; rejoice in the Lord always, for you have no occasion to trouble yourselves. “Again I say, rejoice;” and I mean it, too; rejoice precisely because you serve the Lord, and therefore have to expect the eternal reward of heaven, the hope of which should fill you with joy even in this troubled life. My dear brethren, St. John Chrysostom, considering these words, makes this reflection, which is suitable to our subject, etc. *Continues as above.*

**FORTY-EIGHTH SERMON.**

**ON THE JOY OF THE ELECT IN THE BEATIFIC VISION.**

**Subject.**

The souls of the elect in heaven shall be filled with joy in the sight, love, and possession of God.—*Preached on the feast of the Ascension.*

**Text.**

*Videntibus illis elevatus est.*—Acts i. 9.

“While they looked on He was raised up.”

**Introduction.**

My dear disciples, said the Lord, I am leaving you; I go on before you, and return to Him who sent Me into the world to you: “I go to Him that sent Me.”<sup>1</sup> A sad and unwelcome news this, and to sweeten it somewhat He had to add: “I go to prepare a place for you,”<sup>2</sup> and to await you there. These words Our Lord spoke a good while before His ascension, just as a good friend who has a long journey before him takes leave of his relatives and acquaintances betimes. But what consolation, delight, and joy, mingled indeed with sorrow, did not the apostles experience when they afterwards saw their beloved Master on Mount Olivet, and beheld Him rising gradually from the earth, soaring in the air for a time, then standing still, and again slowly mounting towards heaven! There is no doubt that they were pained at the thought of losing Him and being separated from Him; and the sight of His departure from them must have been a sorrowful one; yet they must have rejoiced at the same time because they saw that the way to heaven was opened for them, and that they should one day enter on it. Oh, truly a joyful hope! I go from you; but it is to prepare a place for you; it is for your good, your advantage that I go to heaven before you. You shall indeed see Me no longer in this mortal life; but in that place to which I am now ascending, and to which you shall come also, you shall see Me for all eternity. And that it

<sup>1</sup> *Vado ad eum qui misit me.*—John xvi. 5.

<sup>2</sup> *Vado parare vobis locum.*—Ibid. 2.

is, my dear brethren, that constitutes the perfect happiness of the elect in heaven; they shall behold the Son of God, not only in His human nature, but also in the complete, infinite, and all-perfect beauty of His Godhead and divine nature. In this vision of God, from which love and joy necessarily spring, consists the essential happiness of the elect, as theologians tell us; so that if there were no other joy in heaven but this vision alone, still the happiness of the blessed would be perfect. Oh, rejoice, just souls that serve the Lord! If we go to heaven, as we hope, we shall see God, love God, and rejoice in God for all eternity. The immensity of this joy we shall now make the subject of our meditation, namely.

### Plan of Discourse.

*The souls of the elect in heaven shall be filled with joy in the sight, love, and possession of God. Such is the whole subject. Let us begin here on earth this heavenly occupation, that is, think of God, love God, rejoice in God. Such shall be the conclusion.*

And that we may make it and constantly adhere to it, give us Thy light and grace, O glorious Saviour! through the merits of Mary, Thy Mother, and the intercession of our holy guardian angels.

The joy of the elect in seeing God can be inferred from the joy they have outside of God.

If a blessed soul in heaven finds such unspeakable delight in the knowledge and possession of those things that are outside of God, what infinite joy it must experience in God Himself, who has imparted all their wonderful beauty and properties to those things? If such magnificence and glory are to be seen in the forecourts of heaven, such riches in the dwelling-place of the blessed, what must there not be in Him who is the Creator and Lord of all the heavens? If creatures, who are only small drops fallen from the sovereign Good, are so beautiful, sweet, and pleasing, that they make a delightful paradise for the soul, what must not God be, who is the living Source and Origin of all sweetness, all beauty, all delight? And how the soul will rejoice when it is allowed to satiate itself fully at that Fountain! Such is the reasoning employed by St. Augustine. "If," he says, "heavenly goods are so great and so noble, what must not God Himself be who has prepared them? If you seek for greatness, God is greater than heaven and earth; if you seek for beauty, God is



infinitely more beautiful than all things in heaven and on earth; if you desire sweetness, God is sweeter than all sweet things." How great then must not be the joy of possessing this sovereign Good in clear vision, and possessing Him by love as your very own property? When the disciples saw the glorified humanity of Our Lord on Mount Thabor, they were ravished out of themselves, and became almost senseless through delight. "Lord," cried out Peter, "it is good for us to be here."<sup>1</sup> Let us build tabernacles that we may dwell here forever. They thought they were already in heaven. What would have been their feelings if they had got even one glimpse of Our Lord's divinity?

Even in this mournful vale of tears the mere remembrance and love of God sometimes, as St. John Chrysostom remarks, cause such comfort and delight to His faithful servants that all their trials and crosses become sweet; they take on themselves the greatest labors for God's sake with joy and pleasure, and look on austerities, mortification of the senses, and the chastening of the flesh as most agreeable and delightful; nay, so great sometimes are the joy and consolation they feel in God that they are insensible to the natural pains of the body, and would not exchange the joys they experience for all the goods of the world. St. Francis Borgia, who renounced completely his duchy and all the riches he possessed or had hoped to possess, used to say that one quarter of an hour spent in his cell with God was worth all he had given up in the shape of worldly wealth. The great St. Anthony, hungry and thirsty in his desert, after having spent the whole night kneeling in prayer, used to complain when the sun came in the morning to disturb him by its light in the joy he felt in conversing with God. Our holy Father Ignatius could hardly ever think of God without shedding tears of consolation, and the doctors had to warn him at last to moderate the ardor of his meditations on God, lest he should lose his sight through constant weeping; as it was, he injured his eyes so much that he almost became blind. The holy apostle of the Indies, St. Francis Xavier, in the midst of his apostolic labors once received a special illumination from God while engaged in meditation, and the consolation and delight thus caused him were so great that he could no longer support them and had to cry out: "Enough, O Lord! enough!" No more light! Less consolation or else I must die! I am not able to bear it!

Even in  
this life the  
saints  
found great  
happiness  
in the  
thought of  
God.

<sup>1</sup> Domine, bonum est nos hic esse.—Matt. xvii. 4.

St. Theresa says, in the twenty-eighth chapter of her life, that she studied for a long time how to give some slight idea of the interior joy and delight she had in God, but at last she found that it was unspeakable; all that she could do to give some idea of her experience was to say that in comparison with that joy all the pleasures of the world were insipid, and disgusting, and abominable; that the stars and the sun itself were mere shadows in contrast with that heavenly illumination; that all men seemed to her like sorrowful ghosts, and that she was very near dying of joy.

How great  
then must  
be the joy  
of heaven,  
where we  
shall see  
God clearly  
as He is.

Now, my dear brethren, every memory of God, all the love we have for Him, all the illuminations we receive from Him in this mortal life, no matter how clear they may be, are still mingled with much darkness that is found in the dim light of faith. "We see now through a glass in a dark manner,"<sup>1</sup> as St. Paul says. O my God! how will it be when I come to Thee in heaven? when all darkness shall be banished? when every veil shall be drawn aside? when I shall behold Thee face to face, and as Thou art in Thyself? How exceeding great shall be my joy and delight when Thou shalt show me the treasures and riches Thou hast hidden in Thy infinite being? When all Thy beauties shall exhibit themselves most magnificently, and Thy perfections shall be open before me? Yes, my dear brethren, we shall see this God, and possess and enjoy forever this supreme Good. "We shall see Him as He is;"<sup>2</sup> the Godhead in all its entirety shall be present to the eyes of our minds, and we shall see His omnipotence, His wisdom, His glory, His majesty, His infinite perfections, "as He is," in His own being. And it is in this vision and knowledge that the happiness of the elect principally consists, as St. John says: "Now, this is eternal life: That they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent."<sup>3</sup>

No one  
could bear  
this great  
joy for a  
moment

Ah, poor soul of mine! if thou wert abandoned to thy own natural powers, how I should pity and compassionate thee on thy arrival in heaven! Why? Do I not wish to be there with God forever? Oh, truly, would I were there now! But why then should I pity my soul if I had really gained the end I so much desire? Because if it were left to its natural power alone

<sup>1</sup> Videmus nunc per speculum in ænigmate.—1. Cor. xiii. 12.

<sup>2</sup> Videbimus eum sicuti est.—1. John iii. 2.

<sup>3</sup> Hæc est autem vita æterna: ut cognoscant te, solum Deum verum, et quem misisti, Jesum Christum.—Ibid. xvii. 3.

it could not bear the happiness of heaven for one moment. Now I cannot look at the sun for an instant with my bodily eyes without being blinded; much less should I be able to see my God with the eyes of the soul; they are too weak to bear the infinite splendor of His light and glory. Now it is, naturally speaking, impossible to put the vast ocean into a sack; much less could my soul contain even for a moment the immense joy that comes from the sight of God. Because there is an infinite distance between the divine majesty and the human intellect, and if the latter were not somehow raised and strengthened it would not be capable of seeing God, or of bearing the great happiness of that sight, but in the very first moment would faint and die. This is what God meant in the answer He made to Moses when the latter said to Him: "If therefore I have found favor in Thy sight, show me Thy face, that I may know Thee, and may find grace before Thy eyes." Ah, Moses, replied the Lord, that is a vain desire of yours! "I will show thee all good," but not yet; hereafter in heaven you shall behold Me; but not now. "Thou canst not see My face: for man shall not see Me and live."<sup>1</sup> Thus giving us to understand not only that man must die before being admitted into the glory of heaven, but also that he would be overwhelmed and lose his life through excess of happiness on seeing God.

Human soul, what art thou then to do? How will it be with thee in heaven? Will it help to thy happiness to get there and at once to be annihilated at the sight of God? No; be comforted; thou shalt live; the same God who is to be thy eternal joy will also find the means to enable thee to support for all eternity the brightness of His beauty and the love and joy that spring from it. And that, my dear brethren, as theologians tell us, He will do by the light of glory, a supernatural illumination, a communication of that uncreated light by which God sees and knows Himself. St. John speaks of this in the Apocalypse in his description of the heavenly Jerusalem: "The city hath no need of the sun, nor of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God hath enlightened it."<sup>2</sup> And the Prophet David says: "With Thee is the fountain of life, and in Thy light we shall see

If he  
were not  
strength-  
ened by a  
supernat-  
ural light.

<sup>1</sup> Si ergo inventi gratiam in conspectu tuo, ostende mihi faciem tuam, ut sciam te, et inveniam gratiam ante oculos tuos. Ego ostendam omne bonum tibi. Non poteris videre faciem meam; non enim videbit me homo, et vivet.—Exod. xxxiii. 13, 19, 20.

<sup>2</sup> Civitas non eget sole, neque luna, ut luceant in ea; nam claritas Dei illuminavit eam.—Apoc. xxi. 23.

light;”<sup>1</sup> that is, as interpreters say, in Thy light we shall clearly see Thy divine essence. By this supernatural light of glory the souls of the elect shall be so raised above their natural powers that they shall be able to fix the eyes of the mind on the very centre of all the divine beauties, and to gaze on them as on a bright sun undazzled and undismayed; and the same light of glory shall so strengthen them that they shall contain and endure forever that immense joy without ever being wearied by it. From this alone we may form some idea of the infinite beauty of God, and of the immensity of the joy that results from beholding Him, since a supernatural help is required to prevent the mind from being overwhelmed by it.

By seeing  
God the  
blessed  
shall com-  
pletely  
possess  
Him.

“We shall see Him as He is.” Ah, Christians! if we only love God here with our whole hearts for a short time we shall behold Him face to face in the kingdom of heaven for all eternity, and that too not in the superficial manner in which we see visible things here on earth. If I look at a fine house I cannot therefore say that it is mine. If I see gold and silver I cannot therefore say with truth: this gold and silver belongs to me. But in heaven the vision of God will be at the same time the full possession of God, so that the moment I shall see God and know Him clearly I shall be able to say with truth: God is mine; the God of infinite beauty belongs to me; the great, immense God is wholly mine, and will be my very own for all eternity.

Nay, they  
shall  
become  
like to Him.

Nay, still higher shall my happiness go when I enter heaven; for by vision I shall become changed into my God, so that I shall be able to say with truth: not only is God mine, but I am, so to say, like my God. Nor is this manner of speech too daring when we recollect what St. John says: “We know that when He shall appear we shall be like to Him: because we shall see Him as He is.”<sup>2</sup> Again a great difference between the heavenly vision of God and the sight of objects on earth. If I look at a prince or a king, I do not therefore become a prince or a king nor does it make me rich or beautiful to behold one who is rich or beautiful. But the clear vision of God changes a man into God, and as it were transforms him into the beauty and nature of God: “We shall be like to Him.” “As many as are there,” says St. Augustine, “are gods; they all know God without error, they see Him without end, they praise Him without fatigue, they

<sup>1</sup> *Apud te est fons vitæ, et in lumine tuo videbimus lumen.*—Ps. xxxv. 10.

<sup>2</sup> *Scimus, quoniam cum apparuerit, similes ei erimus: quoniam videbimus eum sicuti est.*—1. John iii. 2.

love Him without weariness. They always see Him, and always desire to see Him, such a desirable sight is He. They always love Him, and always desire to love Him, so amiable is He.”<sup>1</sup> In this delightful enjoyment they have perpetual repose; they are always filled with God, always united with God, not otherwise than a drop of water poured into a vessel full of wine, or a piece of iron made red hot in the fire; the water indeed still remains water in its nature, and the iron is still iron; but the former is so mixed and confounded with the wine, and the latter with the fire, that one cannot distinguish between them; and he who drinks out of the vessel of wine cannot say that he has drunk water, but pure wine; and he who is burnt by the hot iron cannot say that it is the iron, but the fire that has injured him. So, says St. Bernard, will it be with me when I go to heaven and there behold God: “the substance indeed shall remain, but in another form, another glory, another power, when I come and appear before the face of God.”<sup>2</sup> Thus by this vision I shall be united with my God, and take to myself all His properties, so that there shall hardly be any traceable difference between God and me. Like God, I shall not be able to sin; like God, I shall be immortal; like God, impassible; like God, beautiful, free, reposeful, happy; nay, I shall enjoy the same happiness that my God enjoys, and for as long as He shall enjoy it. “We shall be like to Him, because we shall see Him as He is.”

O my God! is not that a too great and lavish reward for the little I can do for Thee here on earth? To be like Thee for all eternity! Would it not be more than enough for me to have the happiness of being numbered among Thy elect as their companion, and of living forever in Thy own house? Would it not be honor enough for me to wait on Thee at the throne of Thy glory as Thy servant and attendant? Would it not be happiness enough for me to be with Thee always as Thy friend and child? Would it not be joy enough to behold and admire forever the infinite beauty of Thy countenance? Would it not be wealth enough to possess Thee, the supreme Good, as my very own property? No; “I have said: You are gods, and all of you the

And shall  
rule with  
Him for-  
ever.

<sup>1</sup> Quotquot tibi sunt, dii sunt: omnes cognoscunt Deum sine errore, vident sine fine, laudant sine fatigatione, amant sine fastidio. Semper vident, et semper videre desiderant: tam desiderabilis est ad videndum. Semper amant, semper amare desiderant: tam dulcis est ad amandum.—S. Aug. 1. de anima et spiritu.

<sup>2</sup> Manebit quidem substantia, sed in alia forma, alia gloria, alia potentia, quando veniam et apparebo ante faciem Dei.

sons of the Most High."<sup>1</sup> "We shall be like to Him," when we see Him. When King Pharaoh gave Joseph authority over the whole of Egypt, he said to him: "Thou shalt be over my house, and at the commandment of thy mouth all the people shall obey, only in the kingly throne will I be above."<sup>2</sup> So shall God say to the elect soul in heaven; now you see Me as I am; all that I am, all that I have shall be yours too; you shall rule and govern as I do; you shall rejoice with the same joy in which My happiness consists; only in the kingly and divine throne will I be above you; that is, I am God of Myself, and in My own nature; you shall be a god by My grace and in My likeness. O happiness of the saints, how great thou art! as great as is the immense, infinite God Himself!

From this vision springs a most ardent love of God.

From this we can easily see how fervent, intimate, and joyful is the love that will burn for all eternity in the souls of the elect on account of this vision of and union with God. There is nothing on earth that can be compared to it even remotely. There is nothing on earth sweeter to the hearts of those who love each other than the enjoyment and gratification of their mutual affection; but neither is there anything on earth more bitter or tormenting to the heart than love, because it can never be fully satisfied. If the beloved object is away, the heart is tormented by desire and longing; if the loved one is present, there is a fear of losing him, or of his suffering some accident; if he is always before the eyes, either the progress of age, causing his appearance to change, or the fact of having his company always takes away much from the first fervor and happiness. Oh, how different it will be with the love of the elect for their God, and of God for His elect! To love always and burn in the fire of love, and always be loved most perfectly by the Person whom one loves; to love always and always have the loved One present; to love always and be always united with the loved One; to love always and always possess with the Beloved all that one can wish for and desire; to love always and be always certain that for all eternity that love will never bring weariness; to love always, and since the Beloved is unchangeable, never to suffer a change in that love,—oh, what bliss! what joy!

The joy that arises from this

O eternal vision of my God! O eternal love of my God! O eternal joy of my Lord! what am I to think and say of thee?

<sup>1</sup> Ego dixi: dñi estis, et dñi Excelsi omnes.—Ps. lxxx. 6.

<sup>2</sup> Tu eris super domum meam, et ad tui oris imperium cunctus populus obediet: uno tantum regni sollo te præcedam.—Gen. xli. 40.

To no purpose do I strain every effort either to understand thee, <sup>is inde-</sup> or to speak of thee worthily to my hearers, or else I might fare <sup>scribable.</sup> as did St. Augustine. He tells us of himself that at the instance of his friend Severus, he undertook to write a short description of the joys of heaven; but the sublimity of the subject frightened him, and he asked advice from St. Jerome. Augustine was at Hippo at the time, and was actually on the point of inditing the letter to St. Jerome, when behold, he became suddenly aware of a most delicious perfume in the room, and saw a beautiful, brilliant light, far surpassing that of the sun, in the midst of which appeared St. Jerome, who had died that very day and hour. "While," says Augustine, "I was actually writing the first words of salutation to Jerome, an indescribable light, such as had never been seen in our times, and could not at all be pictured by any words of ours, along with an ineffable and unknown fragrance composed of all perfumes, entered the cell in which I was." Augustine was amazed at this, and quite ravished out of himself. Meanwhile a clear voice was heard coming out of the light and thus addressing him: "Augustine, what dost thou seek? Dost thou think to put the vast ocean into a small cup, or to hold the earth in the hollow of thy hand? Will thy eye see what no mortal ever beheld? or thy ear perceive sounds that never penetrated mortal ears? Or dost thou imagine that thou canst conceive what no human heart ever understood or thought of? What end could there be to what is infinite? What measure to that which is immense?" The voice continued to explain to him that it is impossible to describe the happiness of the glory of heaven, and concluded thus: "Do not attempt the impossible. Do not seek here what cannot be found unless in that place which you are now, to your own great happiness, striving to reach. Let your endeavor be so to live here that you may have in eternity what you now wish to understand in some degree." So far St. Jerome to Augustine; while the latter was so enraptured with the light and the delicious perfume, that he says: "So great is the bliss of eternal light that if one could not remain in it any longer than the space of one day, yet for the sake of enjoying it for that short time one would have just reason for despising innumerable years of this life, though filled with all imaginable delights, riches, and temporal goods." O eternal vision of my God! O eternal joy of my Lord! how incomprehensible is the happiness you make in heaven! Suffice it now

for us to know that you are the same vision, the same love, the same joy with which the infinitely happy God sees, loves, and enjoys Himself!

Until we  
possess it  
in heaven.

When we shall one day possess you in the city of God it shall be with us as it was with the queen of Saba when she saw Solomon seated on his throne of glory, and heard the words of wisdom he uttered. "And when the queen of Saba," says the Scripture, "saw all the wisdom of Solomon, and the house which he had built, and the meat of his table, and the apartments of his servants, and their apparel, . . . she had no longer any spirit in her," and almost fainted through wonder. At last, when she somewhat recovered herself, she said to the king: "The report is true which I heard in my own country concerning thy words and concerning thy wisdom. And I did not believe them that told me, till I came myself and saw with my own eyes, and have found that the half hath not been told me: thy wisdom and thy works exceed the fame which I heard. Blessed are thy men, and blessed are thy servants who stand before thee always and hear thy wisdom."<sup>1</sup> With much greater wonder, O Lord! and if Thou didst not strengthen me with the help of the supernatural light of glory, with a far greater faintness of spirit, even to annihilation, should I think and say when I see Thee for the first time in the kingdom of heaven: "Thy wisdom and Thy works exceed the fame which I heard." O God of glory! I have been told on earth great and wonderful things of the joys and delights of Thy palace; much have I heard of the wealth of Thy court, of the glory of Thy eternal kingdom; but, O God of majesty! all that I have heard is nothing compared to what I now see with my own eyes and experience in the vision of Thyself! "Blessed are Thy men who stand before Thee always!" More than blessed are they who rule and rejoice with Thee forever! More than blessed am I, too, who am now in the number of those who possess this infinite joy in and with Thee for eternity!

Hence the  
servants of  
God were

When I consider all this, my dear brethren, I am not surprised that holy servants of God here on earth long so ardently and

<sup>1</sup> Videns autem regina Saba omnem sapientiam Solomonis, et domum quam edificaverat, et cibos mense ejus, et habitacula servorum, et ordines ministrantium, vestesque eorum . . . non habebat ultra spiritum. Dixitque ad regem: Verus est sermo quem audiui in terra mea super sermonibus tuis, et super sapientia tua; et non credebam narrantibus mihi, donec ipsa veni, et vidi oculis meis, et probavi quod media pars mihi nuntiata non fuerit: major est sapientia et opera tua, quam rumor quem audiui. Beati viri tui, et beati servi tui qui stant coram te semper, et audiunt sapientiam tuam.—III. Kings x. 4-8.



with so many sighs and tears for the knowledge and vision of God. Reason enough have SS. Chrysostom, Ambrose, Augustine, Cyprian, and Bernard, whose writings are filled with the expression of that desire. "O my God! I can speak only of what is in my heart, and of what I am always thinking of."<sup>1</sup> "Wretched man that I am in being without Thee, in not seeing Thee!"<sup>2</sup> "To live without Thee is death to me; to die for Thee is my life!"<sup>3</sup> "O joy above all joys! O joy surpassing every joy! outside of which there is no joy, when shall I enter into thee to see my God, who dwells in thee?"<sup>4</sup> "How long shall I be miserably cast about by the waves of this mortality of mine, calling to Thee, my God, and Thou wilt not hear?"<sup>5</sup> "Hear me, O Lord! calling out to Thee from this vast ocean, and bring me to the haven of eternal happiness!"<sup>6</sup> O vision of my God! O knowledge of my God! thou alone art the object of my desires, the end of all my sighs and longings! Let me lose all else if I can only gain thee; if I possess thee alone I am rich enough! O divine countenance! when shall I behold thee? "As the hart panteth after the fountains of waters," sighs forth David, filled with a similar longing, "so my soul panteth after Thee, O God! My soul hath thirsted after the strong, living God: when shall I come and appear before the face of God?"<sup>7</sup> When shall that happy time come? There is nothing on this earth that can give me pleasure. I have been a shepherd, and have asked Thee for strength to slay the lions and bears that attacked my flock; I thought I was fortunate enough when I obtained that favor from Thee; I did obtain it, but I am not satisfied with it. I wished to engage in combat with a huge giant and to overthrow him, and I succeeded in doing so. As a reward I was promised the daughter of an earthly king in marriage; again I thought my desires were all satisfied, but not yet had I found what could fully content me. At last the crown was placed on my head; now I am a rich, powerful king seated

<sup>1</sup> Solum quod mihi est cordi loquar.

<sup>2</sup> Miserum me, quod te careo! miserum me, quod te non video!

<sup>3</sup> Sine te vivere mihi mori est; pro te mori mihi vivere est!

<sup>4</sup> O gaudium super gaudium! gaudium vincens omne gaudium, extra quod non est gaudium, quando intrabo in te, ut videam Deum meum, qui habitat in te?

<sup>5</sup> Quamdiu miser jactabor in fluctibus mortalitatis mee, clamans ad te Domine, et non exaudis?

<sup>6</sup> Audi clamantem Domine de hoc mari magno, et adduc me ad portum felicitatis eterne!

<sup>7</sup> Quemadmodum desiderat cervus ad fontes aquarum; ita desiderat anima mea ad te, Deus. Sitivit anima mea ad Deum fortem vivum; quando veniam et apparebo ante faciem Dei?—Ps. xli. 2, 3.

on a throne, but I am not on that account happier or more pleased, nor shall I ever be so until I come and appear before Thy face, O God! Then Thou wilt make my joy complete. Ah, when is that to happen? "When shall I come and appear before the face of God?"

The folly of men in having such little desire for heaven.

All these sighs, longings, and desires on the part of the servants of God do not surprise me. What does excite my astonishment is our own blindness and stupidity, which can never be sufficiently deplored, inasmuch as we have such little desire for this supreme good, and squander our affections and love on trifles and baubles, on mere fancies and curious conceits, on dreams and shadows, on a momentary lust, on a breath of worldly honor, on a piece of money or land, on the perishable beauty of a mortal creature; these things we almost fall down before and worship, while we neglect the supreme, infinite, immense good, that alone can satiate our hearts and make us happy; and we think as little of it as if we wished to refuse credence to those who remind us of it and to the divine promises!

Exhortation and resolution never to offend God.

Ah, dear Christians, whatever we do in this world, let us above all see that we so live as once to possess our God in eternity! Better were it for us never to have been born than to fail in this one object, our everlasting happiness. We all wish to go to heaven, do we not? Ah, truly, that is our hope, nor is there one who desires another fate. Courage, then; we shall all go to heaven, every one of us that is here present; so let each one imagine and believe certainly as far as he himself is concerned. But let each one say to himself: I will be happy forever; I will see my God, love my God, eternally rejoice in my God; shall I then, I ask, offend and trample under foot that God of infinite beauty, whom I believe that I shall behold, whom I know to be and to have been always worthy of being loved above all things with the whole heart? Shall I not now serve Him with all my strength, and fulfil His holy will in all things? Shall I have to say to myself, to my own shame, when I see my God in eternity: see how the good God has prepared for me, in preference to so many millions who are burning in hell, this endless joy and glory in His own house, in heaven, in His company; and during my life I have done so little for it all! I have so often offended and angered Him! No! such shall now be our resolution, that shall never be the case again. My greatest sorrow is that it has ever happened.

I hope and trust to see my God forever in heaven; therefore I will enjoy a foretaste of this happiness already on earth as far as may be, and shall constantly keep myself in the presence of God, and offer up all my actions by the good intention for His sake and in His honor. I hope and trust to love God forever in heaven; therefore I will now at once begin with this love, and in this life I will love God with all my heart above all things, and in future no pleasure, no gain, no mortal, no creature shall have such value in my sight as to withdraw me from the love of my God by sin. I hope and trust to come to heaven and rejoice there forever with God; therefore I will now seek my only consolation and joy in my Lord and God. That is what Christ promised to His disciples and in their persons to us all. They came to Him exulting and told Him how they had cast out demons, and forced them by their word to leave the bodies of the possessed; "but yet," said Our Lord, "rejoice not in this, that spirits are subject unto you;" that is not a matter for you to make so much of: "but rejoice in this, that your names are written in heaven."<sup>1</sup> That is an advantage that may well cause you to rejoice with good reason: that your names are written in the Book of Life among the elect to eternal glory. Dear Christians, this is said to us also. If we have received special gifts of nature from God, that is nothing for us to rejoice at; if we are rich in temporal goods, high in honors before the world, that is nothing to rejoice at; if we are comely of person and beloved by many, and find much pleasure in earthly things, that is no reason for us to rejoice. Ah, these things are far too vile to be the cause of true joy! If there is one who is made happy by them, there are hundreds whom they have brought to damnation. For one reason alone shall we rejoice in the Lord, namely, the hope we have of being in the number of the elect. If we have to live in all sorts of misery, to endure crosses and trials, poverty, trouble, and persecution, that is no reason why we should be sad or ill at ease; if there is one in hell on account of such things, there are hundreds in heaven who have reached there by the rugged way of the cross. This hope alone can fill us with true joy; this alone can give us courage and delight us in this life above all joys, that our names are written in the Book of Life, that we shall see our God forever in heaven, love Him, and rejoice with

And to rejoice even now in the hope of heaven hereafter.

<sup>1</sup> In hoc nolite gaudere, quia spiritus vobis subiacentur; gaudete autem, quod nomina vestra scripta sunt in coelis.—Luke x. 20.

Him forever. Christians, let us serve this God here on earth that this hope of ours may one day be realized. Amen.

*Another introduction to the same sermon for the fourth Sunday of Advent.*

**Text.**

*Videbit omnis caro salutare Dei.*—Luke iii. 6.

“And all flesh shall see the salvation of God.”

**Introduction.**

That is finally what shall constitute the perfect happiness of the elect soul in heaven, that it will behold its God and Saviour, not merely in His human nature, but in all the beauty, infinity, and immensity of the divinity, etc. *Continues as above.*

**FORTY-NINTH SERMON.**

**ON THE PLEASURES OF SENSE IN HEAVEN.**

**Subject.**

1. There shall be nothing in the kingdom of heaven to cause the body the least pain; 2. There shall be in the kingdom of heaven everything to give the body pleasure.—*Preached on the feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary.*

**Text.**

*Assumpta est Maria in cælum.*—From the Office of the day.

“Mary was assumed into heaven.”

**Introduction.**

There is a great difference between the death of Mary, the Mother of God, and that of other saints. Of the latter we say: he died a happy death; his holy soul is with God in heaven, while the body he has left behind is decaying in the grave, or his bones are kept in honor in the churches. But of Mary the Catholic Church sings with all her heart: “Mary was assumed into heaven.” That is, not only does her soul rejoice there, but Mary is raised body and soul to a throne of glory in heaven. And that too with good reason. For it is not seemly that the immaculate

body, in which the Holy of holies was conceived and remained for nine months, should stay on this earth, and be so long deprived of the heavenly resting-place due to it. No! Mary was assumed into heaven. On this day the Queen of heaven made her triumphal entry with body and soul into the kingdom of heaven. With what joy and exultation that entry took place I leave to your pious thoughts. My dear brethren, shall we too one day be taken up to heaven in the same manner? Yes, if, as we hope, we die a happy death; but that shall not be the case with us until our bodies, that shall have decayed in the grave, shall rise from the dead on the last day; then with body and soul, accompanied by the whole multitude of the elect, we shall make our joyful entry into the city of God, there to be happy forever together. This entry I have described on a former occasion. But now the question arises: shall the body too have its delights in heaven, those delights that we think so much of on earth? Truly, and that too without measure or end, as I now propose to consider.

#### Plan of Discourse.

*There shall be nothing in the kingdom of heaven to cause the body the least pain; such shall be briefly the subject of the first part. There shall be in the kingdom of heaven everything to give the body pleasure; the second part. Therefore let us now for a short time mortify our bodies in this vale of tears for God's sake, that when we are called from this earth we may find eternal pleasures in heaven.*

Such is the conclusion that we beg of Thy grace, O King of glory! through the merits of the Queen of heaven and of the angels, Mary, of whom we again say with pride and joy of heart: "Mary was assumed into heaven."

As far as bodily torments are concerned, we know so much of them by daily experience that it is not necessary to describe them in words: They consist in all those adverse things that occasion trouble, discomfort, and pain to the flesh and the senses; such as disquiet, labor, affliction, heat, cold, hunger, thirst, sickness, old age, sorrow, death, without speaking of the exterior injuries that can happen to us in so many ways. It is from these things, my dear brethren, that the evils come that afflict us in this vale of tears at all times, in all places; this is the un-

On earth this body of ours is tried by all sorts of afflictions.

lucky inheritance that has descended to us unfortunate children from the sin of our first parents. There is no one in this world who is altogether free from these evils. Even princes, kings, emperors—all men, no matter who they are, have their share in them, or at least have to live in constant dread of them. The poor and needy who have to suffer hunger and thirst, servants and laborers who have to work from morning till night for their daily bread until their bodies are worn out with fatigue, the rich and prosperous with all their wealth and treasures—all have enough care and trouble to occupy them during the day, and even to interfere with their rest at night. The heat of summer, the cold of winter, the darkness of the night, the harshness of the air, the damp of the rains, the turmoil of the winds, the disagreeable change of the seasons, the increase and decrease of the bodily strength are common to all.

All the members of the body are subject to countless defects and diseases.

There is no limb of the body that is not subject to its special and even manifold ailments and shortcomings. Galen, the prince of physicians, discovered a hundred and twelve different ailments that attack the eye alone. Pliny is of the opinion that the illnesses that the different members of the body are liable to cannot be counted. Headaches, vertigo, noises in the ears, cancer and polypus in the nose, intolerable toothaches, swellings in the neck, apoplexy, palpitation of the heart, congestion of the liver, aches in the stomach and bowels, spleen, neuralgia, pains in the back and shoulders, gout in the hands and feet, dropsy, jaundice, arthritis, and a host of different fevers that attack the whole body, some of which are ordinary and rooted in the blood, while others come now and then at unforeseen intervals; some of these bring death suddenly, others wear away the body slowly; all of them, no matter what they are, bring discomfort, pain, and sorrow. And even if one is for a time free from all these illnesses, how easy is it not for him to meet with an accident, to stumble and break an arm or leg, and thus be thrown on his bed suffering horrible pain in his whole body? Moreover there are wasps, flies, gnats, and countless other insects that plague and torment us in spite of all our efforts to get rid of them, and, as it were, grow up with us.

Even pleasures may cause discomfort.

Nay, even the few small pleasures and joys that this mortal life affords for our recreation and encouragement are themselves very frequently the cause of chagrin and trouble. No matter how carefully and expensively food and drink are prepared, if

they are taken in excess they overload the stomach and bring on an attack of illness; rest and sleep, if too long indulged in, make the head heavy and stupid; walking, hunting, dancing, playing, weary the body; carnal pleasures destroy the strength of the body and shorten life; everything else that can give pleasure to the eyes, ears, and other senses, causes only disgust if too long continued. And last of all there is death, the most disagreeable of all to the body and the senses, that dogs our footsteps every moment, and that no man can avoid, although the very thought of it is enough to terrify us. This completely destroys the body, plunders it of every comfort and good that still remained to it on earth, gives it to the worms as their food, causes it to crumble into dust, and fills the survivors with sadness and mourning.

Oh, poor mortals that we are, what a lot is ours after all! Where are we living? With reason does Job sigh forth: "Man born of a woman, living for a short time, is filled with many miseries," even in the brief time of his life. "Who cometh forth like a flower and is destroyed, ... and never continueth in the same state."<sup>1</sup> And how blind we mortals are still to love this woful and painful prison! Many would think themselves fortunate if they could always escape death and live here forever. And what weeping and wailing there is when a little child dies and is released prematurely out of this vale of tears! We seek our happiness here, but ah, we shall never find it! It will be with us as with St. Maclovius; when he was a simple-minded youth he heard that there was a fortunate island in which no one had to labor or suffer. He embarked in a ship in order to find it. He came to an island, and there found some people of a pale and sickly complexion, who all looked weak and suffering. Then he thought to himself: this must be a very unhealthy place; this cannot be the fortunate island. He went farther and found an island of which the inhabitants had all clear and beautiful complexions, but their clothes were torn and ragged. Here, he said, the air must be good, but the poverty is great; this cannot be the fortunate island. He goes still farther and comes to a place abounding with riches; but hardly had he set foot on land when he saw that the inhabitants were engaged in a fierce battle in which many were wounded and many lost their lives. How is this? thought he. There is

So that it is  
vain to seek  
for happi-  
ness on  
earth.  
Shown by  
an example.

<sup>1</sup> Homo natus de muliere, brevi vivens tempore, repletur multis miseriis. Qui quasi flos egreditur et conteritur, ... et nunquam in eodem statu permanet.—Job xiv. 1, 2.

wealth enough here, but it is a very disturbed and turbulent place; it cannot be the happy island. He spent seven years in the search; but in one place he found an excessive heat, in another a piercing cold, in another terrible earthquakes, in a fourth violent storms; here he saw blind people, there cripples and deformed, everywhere sickness, weakness, and death. At the end of the seven years his eyes were opened, and he acknowledged that no place of perfect happiness can be found on this earth, and that therefore all his labor and research were in vain; he then resolved to renounce all earthly things, to shut himself up in a monastery, and there by diligently serving God seek heavenly and eternal happiness. And this resolution he carried into effect.

In heaven  
there will  
be nothing  
of the kind  
to fear.

Christian faith, give us the same light! Open our eyes, show us the place where a far different, better, and truly happy life awaits us! Raise our hearts to heaven, for the possession of which after death we are all created! There alone is the truly happy country in which not the least of the evils enumerated can be found or feared. "They shall no more hunger nor thirst," says St. John in the Apocalypse, speaking of the inhabitants of the heavenly Jerusalem, as they were described to him by the infallible word of God Himself, "neither shall the sun fall on them, nor any heat."<sup>1</sup> There shall be no cold or harsh weather there to annoy them, for summer, winter, spring, autumn, and the other changes of the seasons find no place in the city of God. There will be no darkness or night there, because that heavenly sun is no movable body that hides the light now and then and disappears behind a cloud, marking by its rising and setting the day and night, as we now experience on earth; but it will shine by an invariable light and will make one everlasting and most joyful day. "Nor mourning, nor crying, nor sorrow shall be any more;...death shall be no more;"<sup>2</sup> no fear of death shall ever trouble the elect, for they shall enjoy an everlasting life, and that too a life free from all discomfort and sickness, a life without change, without chagrin and old age; in a word, a life in which not the least thing can be found to cause pain, sorrow, or annoyance. "You know not what you ask,"<sup>3</sup> such is the reproof given by Our Lord to the mother and sons of

<sup>1</sup> Non esurient, neque sitient amplius; nec cadet super illos sol, neque ullus aestus.—Apoc. vii. 16.

<sup>2</sup> Neque luctus, neque clamor, neque dolor erit ultra;...mors ultra non erit.—Ibid. xxi. 4.

<sup>3</sup> Nescitis quid petatis.—Matt. xx. 22.



Zebedee, who were asking Him for a seat in His kingdom. But was not their request a reasonable one? Otherwise were they wrong in desiring to attain glory before drinking the chalice of suffering? Yes; that was one reason why they were reprov'd; but St. Anthony of Padua gives another; they had asked to be allowed to sit, one at the right, the other at the left hand of Our Lord, and therein they showed their great ignorance in thinking that there would be a left side in heaven, "for there is no left side where there is neither adversity nor diminution of happiness."<sup>1</sup>

Courage, then, pious souls, who spend your days in the constant mortification of your bodies and in works of penance, or who have to earn your bread according to the decrees of Providence in a lowly state, with labor and trouble, and in the sweat of your brows; and you too, poor, oppressed mortals, who through a similar decree of the Almighty are overwhelmed with poverty, sickness, and weakness, persecuted by others, and surrounded on all sides by trials, crosses, and afflictions! Leave to the world its false joys; let it afford its vain pity for your seemingly hapless condition; do you only raise your eyes to heaven, where you will be free from all your miseries. Think to yourselves: here in this vale of tears, in this place of suffering, we are indeed in a miserable state; but it will not be for long. If I now suffer with a good conscience for God's sake, and bear my cross with patience and resignation to His holy will, I shall have an eternal inheritance in heaven, where all my tears shall be wiped away. Then all that can now afflict and cause me pain shall be banished forever; then there will be an end to all labor, trouble, and suffering, and in their place I shall have endless joy and happiness. So it is, my dear brethren; in heaven, not only will there be nothing that can in the least afflict the body (and if we had that to say on earth we should think ourselves in a heaven of bliss), but in heaven there will be everything that can delight our bodies and make them most perfectly happy, as we shall see in the

Comfort  
for the  
repentant,  
the afflicted,  
and those  
who are  
heavily  
laden.

## Second Part.

The pleasures of the body consist in the things that please and refresh the five outward senses, namely, in hearing and seeing agreeable things, in smelling sweet perfumes, in enjoying good

In heaven  
the body  
shall have  
all imagi-

<sup>1</sup> *Ibi non erit sinistra, quia nec adversitas, nec gaudium diminutum.*

nable pleasures.

food and drink, and in agreeable sensations. If all the senses have their full enjoyment at once,—and that rarely happens on this earth,—then the happiness of the body is complete. Imagine now, my dear brethren, as well as you can, each and everything that can delight eyes, ears, smell, taste, and touch in a lawful manner, and raise that delight to the highest degree that the mind of man can conceive in this life, even then you will have only an imperfect sketch of the pleasures we shall enjoy in heaven. So speaks the mellifluous doctor, St. Bernard: “that happiness exceeds all thought and all desire.”<sup>1</sup> And truly that the body with its senses shall have its pleasures and delights in heaven, besides the bliss that shall inundate the soul in the vision of God, is infallibly certain from the Holy Scriptures, the Fathers of the Church, and the very name itself of eternal happiness. For what is happiness? According to theologians with Boetius, “it is a state made perfect by the aggregation of every possible good;”<sup>2</sup> it is the seat and safe dwelling of all desirable pleasures, and therefore nothing can be wanting to it which is good and can serve to delight; hence since the pleasures of sense belong thereto, they also must necessarily be found in heaven.

And the body has a right to this, because it too has worked for heaven.

Justice, too, and equity demand this. He who labors, as the old saying goes, must eat; and he who helps to earn must have his wages. A general would act unjustly if after having won a battle or captured a town he kept all the spoils for himself alone, and his soldiers who helped him to victory by shedding their blood and fighting for him would have good reason to complain if there were no share of the booty for them. It is true that the human soul, which alone is endowed with reason, has the chief and greatest part here in this life in serving God and gaining heaven; it must command and keep the members and senses of the body in order, and urge them on to fight and labor in order to keep the commandments of God. But what could the soul do if the body with its senses did not help it? This latter, like the common soldiers in a battle, has the heaviest part of the work to do in the observance of the commandments: the eyes must often mortify themselves so as not to see; the ears so as not to hear; the hands so as not to touch anything that could inflame the passions; the taste must fast, or against its inclination often abstain from forbidden food or from excess in eating or drinking;

<sup>1</sup> *Excedit cogitatum omnem, desiderium omne exsuperat illa felicitas.*—S. Bern. *Serm. de verb. Petri.* Ecce nos.

<sup>2</sup> *Status omnium bonorum aggregatione perfectus.*

the flesh is chastised to prevent it from wantonly giving way to those desires to which it is constantly and violently inclined by a perverse nature; the whole body is burdened heavily by having to bear all kinds of sickness, pain, discomfort, and other inconveniences; and hence it would not be just if it too had not its share of reward.

Besides, if this were not the case we should have to say that God is more severe in punishing the wicked than good in rewarding the just, which is altogether opposed to the infinite goodness of His nature. In hell the reprobate suffer, not only in their souls, but also in all the senses and members of their bodies. Terrible darkness and hideous phantoms torment the eyes, clamorous howlings and noises afflict the ears, an intolerable stench fills the nostrils, the taste is tortured by hunger and thirst, by the gall of asps and serpents, while the whole body burns in fire forever. And this punishment is just, because during life the body helped in the enjoyment of various sinful pleasures. And it cannot be less right and just that the body, which has mortified itself and its senses in different ways here on earth for God's sake, should hereafter in a happy eternity receive different kinds of enjoyments from that God whose mercy and generosity are manifested in all His works. Truly there cannot be a doubt of this!

For God is as just in rewarding the good as in punishing the wicked.

But it is equally certain that the pleasures of the body and its senses in heaven shall be infinitely greater than those we enjoy in this vale of tears, if we only consider the Person who will confer those pleasures as a reward for service truly rendered Him. When a great lord on earth gives a public festival, it must correspond to the greatness and magnificence of the giver. Ham and sausage, wine and beer, a fiddle or a bagpipe to make a little music would do well enough for a peasant's wedding-feast; but if an emperor or a king has a gala day far more pomp and splendor are required.

And since God is a great Lord, those pleasures shall be almost infinite.

Not without reason has the Holy Scripture described so minutely the feast that King Assuerus gave the princes and nobles of his kingdom. Read the first chapter of the Book of Esther and you will be amazed at it. The banquet lasted a hundred and eighty days; the place where it was held was an earthly paradise. "In the court of the garden, and of the wood, which was planted by the care and the hand of the king. And there were hung up on every side sky-colored and green and violet

Shown by a simile from Scripture.

hangings, fastened with cords of silk and of purple, which were put into rings of ivory, and were held up with marble pillars. The beds also were of gold and silver, placed in order upon a floor paved with porphyry and white marble, which was embellished with painting of wonderful variety." Wine too was there in abundance, as suited the magnificence of the king, and it was of the best quality, while the attendants were the chief ministers of the king himself. And to what end all this profusion? "That he might show the riches of the glory of his kingdom, and the greatness and boasting of his power."<sup>1</sup> Great and infinite God! wilt Thou then hereafter yield to Thy poor creatures, who can do nothing without Thee, in glory and magnificence? If Thy earthly vassals, who with all their pomp can only give us a dim idea of Thy heavenly splendor, if they in this vale of tears can afford such pleasures and delights to the senses according to the insignificant dignity of their persons, what wilt Thou do? What shall we have to see, to hear, to taste, to feel in Thy palace, where Thou wilt prepare a joyful and splendid feast for Thy dearest friends and children, to show the infinite, immense glory of Thy kingdom of heaven and the greatness of Thy divine power? Truly, my dear brethren, any effort of the imagination we can make here must fall far short of the reality. It is a God, the King and Monarch of all monarchs, of whose greatness there is neither end nor measure, who will in heaven display His splendor and magnificence, especially in the rewarding of His just servants. "I am. . . thy reward exceeding great."<sup>2</sup> He says Himself. From this alone we can form some idea of the superabundance of the delights of the body in heaven. They must be joys befitting and befitting the infinite majesty of God and the state of perfect happiness, and therefore joys with which no earthly pleasures can be compared; joys that shall delight the senses and feelings in the most perfect manner.

Indescribable shall be the pleasures of the eyes.

And in the first place, besides the brightness and beauty of the heavenly palace, the eternal dwelling of God, and the proper home of happiness, which we have already often had as the subject of our meditations, oh, what beautiful and pleasing objects

<sup>1</sup> In vestibulo hortis et nemoris, quod regio cultu et manu constitum erat. Et pendeant ex omni parte tentoria aerei coloris, et carbasini, ac hyacinthini, sustentata funibus byssiis atque purpureis, qui eburneis circulis inserti erant, et columnis marmoreis fulcebantur. Lectuli quoque aerei et argentei super pavimentum smaragdino et parlo stratum lapide, dispositi erant, quod mira varietate pictura decorabat. Ut ostenderet divitias gloriæ regni sui, ac magnitudinem atque jactantiam potentiæ suæ.—Esth. i. 5, 6, 4.

<sup>2</sup> Ego merces tua magna nimis.—Gen. xv. 1.

shall there be presented to the view! Many are of the opinion that we shall see the divine nature itself, not only with the mind, but also with the eyes of the body, which shall be supernaturally strengthened for the purpose of enabling them to behold a pure spirit; and this opinion is founded on the words of the Prophet Job by which he consoles himself in his misfortune seated on the dung-hill: "I shall be clothed again with my skin, and in my flesh I shall see my God. Whom I myself shall see, and my eyes shall behold."<sup>1</sup> Be that as it may, theologians will take a long time to decide the question. Let us be satisfied then with this undoubted fact: that the whole divinity shall be manifested to the soul alone. In any case the eyes of the body shall find a heaven of pleasure quite enough to satisfy them when they see their companions in glory, who will then be most pure and beautiful beings. The soldiers of Holofernes were struck with astonishment when they saw the great beauty of Judith: "Their eyes were amazed, for they wondered exceedingly at her beauty." Holofernes himself was quite captivated at the first sight of her: "And when she was come into his presence, forthwith Holofernes was caught by his eyes."<sup>2</sup> Now if such an effect can be produced by a changeable beauty that must soon become the food of worms (and experience teaches that bodily comeliness almost bewitches and fascinates the beholders), how pleasing must it not then be to have continually before the eyes countless beauties in immortal and glorified bodies, who love each other most tenderly and are beloved in return! What joy and inexpressible bliss it will be for you, O eyes! to see the Queen of angels, the greatest Lady of the world, the most beautiful of mere creatures, the Virgin Mother of the Sovereign God, Mary herself in all her glory and majesty! When St. Denis saw her on earth, before she had put on the attributes of glory, if faith had not kept him back, he would have adored her as God; so he wrote to St. Paul the apostle. And what a joyful sight shall be presented to our eyes in the glorified humanity of Jesus Christ, Our Saviour! Holy St. Chrysostom! the great object of thy wishes was to see "Rome flourishing, Paul preaching, and Christ in His mortal flesh."<sup>3</sup> Oh, more than happy shall I be if one day with thee I

<sup>1</sup> *Rursum circumdabor pelle mea, et in carne mea videbo Deum meum. Quem visurus sum ego ipse, et oculi mei conspecturi sunt.*—Job xix. 26, 27.

<sup>2</sup> *Erat in oculis eorum stupor, quoniam pulchritudinem ejus mirabantur nimis. Cumque intrasset ante faciem ejus, statim captus est in suis oculis Holofernes.*—Judith x. 14, 17.

<sup>3</sup> *Romam in flore, Paulum in ore, Christum in carne.*

shall behold in eternity the heavenly city Jerusalem with all its joys, Paul and the other apostles on their thrones, and Christ, my Saviour, in His glory! Then shall I cry out with Peter: "Lord, it is good for us to be here."<sup>1</sup> Here we wish to remain forever! If there was no other pleasure in heaven than this, it would be enough to make a heaven of itself.

**Of the ears.** Besides, how the ears of the elect shall be delighted when they hear the sweet music and the delicious harmony that so many millions of angels offer their God, as St. John tells us in the fifth and fourteenth chapters of the Apocalypse, according to what he heard himself: "And I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne, and the living creatures and the ancients: and the number of them was thousands of thousands. . . . And the voice which I heard was as the voice of harpers harping on their harps. And they sung, as it were, a new canticle."<sup>2</sup> Then I heard the voices of a great multitude in heaven crying out: Alleluia! O my God! what singers, and voices, and melodies shall be heard at Thy throne! Let all musicians of earth be still before that harmony. A single note of the violin that an angel played for the seraphic St. Francis in his illness sounded so wonderfully sweet that the saint thought he was already in heaven, and was on the point of expiring for happiness. We read the same in the Lives of St. Nicholas of Tolentino, of St. Martin, of the Blessed Servulus, and of other servants of God who heard the song of the angels before their death; the effect of that was to fill them with such a great desire of getting to that place of joys, a drop of which had fallen on them, that they were filled with disgust of this earthly life.

**Of the smell.** And what are we to say of the pleasures of smell in that heavenly garden where there are so many glorified bodies of the saints, of whom the Church sings: "They shall be before Thee as the odor of balsam"<sup>3</sup> The world knows by experience that the bodies of many saints gave forth a most sweet odor after their death, and what is still more wonderful, that a sweet perfume came frequently from their bones, a perfume such as could not be found in any earthly spices. Baronius writes that even during their lives the martyrs, when they were brought out of

<sup>1</sup> Domine, bonum est nos hic esse.—Matt. xvii. 4.

<sup>2</sup> Et audiui vocem angelorum multorum in circuitu throni, et animalium et seniorum; et erat numerus eorum illa millium. . . . Et vocem quam audiui sicut citharædorum citharizantium in citharis suis. Et cantabant quasi canticum novum.—Apoc. v. 11; xiv. 2, 3.

<sup>3</sup> Sicut odor balsami erunt ante te.

the foul prisons in which they had been confined, filled the air with such an agreeable aroma that the heathens, astonished at the sweetness thereof, imagined them to have been anointed with some precious balsam. How will it then be in the land of the living, in the land of glory, when in this sojourn of death bodies destined to corruption can emit such sweet odors?

And, O King of glory, Jesus Christ! how Thou wilt delight Of the taste. our sense of taste and satiate it in that marriage-feast, in that great supper, to which Thou hast so often invited us in the Gospel, and by the promise of which Thou didst console Thy sorrowing disciples before Thy departure from this world! "I dispose to you, as My Father hath disposed to Me, a kingdom, that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom."<sup>1</sup> How well that new wine shall taste, of which Thou saidst to Thy disciples at the Last Supper: "I will not drink from henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I shall drink it with you new in the kingdom of My Father."<sup>2</sup> Then shall we rejoice with Thee, not merely for a hundred and eighty days as in the festival of King Assuerus, but that heavenly supper shall last for all eternity. Then no princes of this world, but Thou Thyself, O Lord! in Thy infinite glory and magnificence, shalt be our attendant, according to Thy own promise: "Blessed are those servants whom the Lord, when He cometh, shall find watching: Amen I say to you, that He will gird Himself, and make them sit down to meat, and passing will minister unto them."<sup>3</sup> Not otherwise than a loving grandfather who assembles all his children and children's children at his table, and serves each one himself, rejoicing exceedingly to see his dear ones making merry with each other. Then shall the prophecy of David be fulfilled: "They shall be inebriated with the plenty of Thy house: and Thou shalt make them drink of the torrent of Thy pleasure."<sup>4</sup>

Finally, as in hell the bodies of the damned shall be torment- Of the touch. ed excessively by fire in the sense of touch, so this sense shall experience the greatest pleasure in heaven. Sometimes if you

<sup>1</sup> Dispono vobis, sicut disposuit mihi Pater meus, regnum, ut edatis et bibatis super mensam meam in regno meo.—Luke xxii. 29, 30.

<sup>2</sup> Non bibam amodo de hoc genimine vitis, usque in diem illam, cum illud bibam vobiscum novum in regno Patris mei.—Matt. xxvi. 29.

<sup>3</sup> Beati servi illi quos cum venerit Dominus, invenerit vigilantes: amen dico vobis, quod præcænet se, et faciet illos discumbere, et transiens ministrabit illis.—Luke xii. 37.

<sup>4</sup> Inebriabuntur ab ubertate domus tuæ: et torrente voluptatis tuæ potabis eos.—Ps. xxxv. 9.

ask a sick man how he is, he can only answer: I am aching all over; all my limbs are filled with pains. If one were to ask a saint in heaven how it is with his glorified body, his only answer could be: it is well with me all over. For like a fish surrounded with water, he swims in an ocean of delights and pleasures; when he enters into heaven he hears the words: "Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord,"<sup>1</sup> so as to be completely immersed therein. Thus all the senses have their own special and perfect satisfaction; and hence the pleasures of the body in heaven are so complete that nothing better can be desired. There is nothing there that can cause the least discomfort to the bodies of the blessed; there is everything, and that too in abundance, that can give them delight and pleasure in the highest degree.

Conclusion  
and resolution  
to mortify the  
senses here,  
that they  
may enjoy  
the delights  
of heaven  
hereafter.

Christians! who is there who would not be inflamed with desire and longing for such a place of joys? I have not the least doubt that all of us here present unanimously wish to get there. But hear what St. Gregory says: "One cannot attain a great reward unless by great labor."<sup>2</sup> The senses, to which endless delights are promised in heaven, must now be mortified and kept in restraint, that they may earn the reward of eternal joys; the senses, I repeat, that are now the greatest enemies of our souls, that do the most to keep us out of heaven if we concede too much to their wanton desires; for it is from them that almost all sin and the material of eternal damnation come. Ah, let us think, whenever they try to lead us to forbidden or dangerous things: is this short-lived, miserable pleasure worth sacrificing the eternal joys of heaven for? Let us think, whenever we find it hard to restrain them: is it not worth my while to bear a slight mortification for the sake of the eternal joys of heaven? Let us think when our bodies are tormented and oppressed by hard labor, cold, heat, or sickness: is it not worth my while to bear this and much more for God's sake in order to gain the everlasting joys of heaven? When one invites a good friend to table, and sees him eating too eagerly of some inferior dish, one is wont to say: leave a little room; there is something better to come. The pleasures of sense that God allows us in this world are, so to speak, only coarse, inferior food placed before us at first; therefore if my senses are apt to fall upon them too greedily I will say to them: wait a while; something better and more agreeable

<sup>1</sup> *Intra in gaudium Domini tui.*—Matt. xxv. 21.

<sup>2</sup> *Ad magna premia pervenire non potest, nisi per magnos labores.*



is coming; we shall have, when we are in heaven, greater pleasures and delights than all that you could desire or wish for on earth. And much more earnestly shall I say that, if they try to lead me into something contrary to the will of God. Eyes, I shall say, why should you wish to see what you may not have? Keep your curiosity for something better and more beautiful; in heaven I will gratify you to the top of your bent. Ears, why should you wish to hear conversation or stories that will disturb my conscience? Wait a while; there is something better coming; something far more agreeable in heaven that will delight you forever. Excessive eating and drinking, you are not permitted me! I will keep my appetite for a better feast; in heaven my taste shall be fully gratified. Away with all impure, carnal lusts! I do not wish even to think of you! Everything shall be banished and renounced once for all that could give the least occasion to you! Better, purer, holier, and immense joys await me in my heavenly country; these I will seek in prosperity and adversity; for them I will strive with all my might; for their sake I will cheerfully bear every cross and suffering, as long as and in whatever degree it pleases God. With the assured hope of possessing them one day I will console myself for the present in this vale of tears, until I shall enjoy them in the land of the living in heaven. Amen.

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**FIFTIETH SERMON.**

**ON THE HAPPY SOCIETY OF THE ELECT IN HEAVEN.**

**Subject.**

The joys of the elect shall be greatly increased by the delightful society that is to be found in the kingdom of heaven alone and nowhere else.—*Preached on the feast of St. John Baptist.*

**Text.**

*Et congratulabantur ei.*—Luke i. 58.

“And they congratulated with her.”

**Introduction.**

Truly does this day bring to our minds a most pleasant and joyful meeting. Zachary, Elizabeth, that holy and God-fearing

couple, the new-born child, John, the wonderful and saintly precursor of Our Lord, the neighbors and relations, all met together with joyful congratulations. "And her neighbors and kinsfolks heard that the Lord had showed His great mercy towards her, and they congratulated with her." But, my dear brethren, my thoughts about this matter relate to something that adds still more to the joy of this meeting. In all probability Mary, who at the time was bearing in her virginal womb the Son of God, was present also; for when the message was brought to her that she was to be the Mother of the Most High, the angel said to her: "And behold thy cousin Elizabeth, she also hath conceived a son in her old age: and this is the sixth month with her." Mark those words, "the sixth month." Mary, after the angel's message, visited Elizabeth and remained with her three months: "And Mary abode with her about three months."<sup>1</sup> Thus she must have been present at the time of the birth of St. John. Oh, I say again, what a delightful and joyful meeting! If we could only have had a glimpse at that holy company, and seen what they did, and heard what they said, and how they wished each other joy! Truly, if there is a paradise on earth it must be where Jesus, the Son of God, Mary, the Mother of God, John, the precursor of the Incarnate God, and Zachary and Elizabeth, those holy friends of God, come together. On earth, I say; for, rejoice again, pious Christians who serve the Lord! In the kingdom of heaven we shall enjoy that society, along with that of countless other friends, and all in the garb of glory, amid endless pleasures for all eternity. It is a joy that I cannot help thinking of, and would to God that we always raised our hearts and minds to this land of bliss that is promised us! At all events we shall now represent it to our imaginations more in detail, and consider the happiness of the elect with each other in heaven.

#### Plan of Discourse.

*The joys of the elect shall be greatly increased by the delightful society that is to be found in the kingdom of heaven alone and nowhere else. Such is the whole subject of this meditation. It is not to be found on earth: the first part; it is only to be found in heaven: the second part. Let us so live that by avoiding bad and dangerous company, and by frequenting the good and pious, we*

<sup>1</sup> Et ecce Elizabeth cognata tua, et ipsa concepit filium in senectute sua: et hic mensis sextus est illi. . . Mansit autem Maria cum illa quasi mensibus tribus.—Luke 1. 36, 56.

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*may one day have the happiness of associating with the elect. Such amongst other points of doctrine shall be the conclusion.*

Give us Thy grace hereto, Christ Jesus: we ask it of Thee through the merits of Mary, of St. John, and of our holy guardian angels.

Of all the lawful pleasures that men can enjoy in this world with each other, the best is agreeable company; when, namely, true and well-known friends, who understand each other and love each other truly, meet in order to rejoice in the Lord. Nay, there is hardly any pleasure without society, and with reason has the philosopher Seneca said that there is no real joy or delight to be found in anything without a companion. Good food and drink taste well; but what of that if I have to sit down alone to table, without a soul near me? I can say that I have eaten and drunk well, but I cannot say that I have enjoyed myself. Put a man quite alone in a royal palace that is abundantly provided with everything; shut him up in it by himself; he will soon grow tired of life and make his escape in order to be again amongst men.

There is no true pleasure without company.

That disposition man has, so to speak, inherited from nature; he is naturally fond of society. Although Adam had in paradise all that he could desire, he would not have been satisfied there long if he had remained alone, as God Himself said of him: "And the Lord God said: It is not good for man to be alone: let us make him a help like unto himself,"<sup>1</sup> that he may have some one to keep him company. The only complaint that the brother of the prodigal son had to make to his father was that the latter never gave him an opportunity of meeting his friends: "Behold, for so many years do I serve thee, and I have never transgressed thy commandment, and yet thou hast never given me a kid to make merry with my friends." Be satisfied, my son, said the father, in order to console him: "Thou art always with me, and all I have is thine."<sup>2</sup> But that was not enough; the son was so displeased that he was unwilling to enter the room in which the other was being entertained. So it is with us too, my dear brethren; he who wishes to amuse himself and spend a pleasant day, either goes out in search of company or invites a few friends to his own house; and even holy

Shown from Scripture.

<sup>1</sup> Dixit quoque Dominus Deus: non est bonum esse hominem solum: faciamus ei adiutorem similem sibi.—Gen. ii. 18.

<sup>2</sup> Ecce tot annis servio tibi, et nunquam mandatum tuum præterivi, et nunquam dedisti mihi hædum, ut cum amicis meis epularer. Tu semper mecum es, et omnia mea tua sunt.—Luke xv. 29, 31.

servants of God are wont to observe that custom. The Scripture tells us of the elder Tobias: "When there was a festival of the Lord, and a good dinner was prepared in Tobias' house, he said to his son: Go and bring some of our tribe that fear God, to feast with us,"<sup>1</sup> and to rejoice in the Lord. Even God Himself, who surely is not in need of society, seems to say that the company of men is pleasing to Him: "My delight is to be with the children of men;"<sup>2</sup> so He tells us by the wise Solomon. Thus society is a recreation and a pleasure for the soul and the mind.

But the company must be in all respects a suitable one if it is to give pleasure.

But not all society gives pleasure, for some may cause annoyance and put an end to enjoyment; that is the case when the companions are not suited to each other. Sometimes when good friends are together there happens to be amongst them or to have come uninvited one who is not looked on favorably by the others, or in whose presence they may not talk confidentially, because they are obliged to show him a certain amount of respect, and to weigh their words when he is there; in such a case there is an end to all pleasure in the gathering; the party is a failure, as the saying goes. And the next day they say: we might have had a very pleasant time of it yesterday if such a one had not been there. Often the absence of one whose society is much sought after by the others spoils the party, so that it is not near so pleasant as it might have been. Ah, they say then, if he were here the party would be complete! And again if all the company are not of the one mind; if one wants to play, the other to sing, the third to talk, the fourth to do this, the fifth that, the party is spoiled again, and there is no amusement. Hence, if there is to be true joy and happiness in a meeting of the kind, the company should consist of good friends who know each other well, love each other truly, and are on such good terms that no one will take what another says in a bad sense, and each is glad on account of the presence of his companions.

Such company is rare in the world.

But where can one find such a loving, friendly, and agreeable company? To no purpose should we seek it on earth. "Nothing," says the Holy Ghost by the wise Ecclesiasticus, "can be compared to a faithful friend, and no weight of gold and silver

<sup>1</sup> Cum esset dies festus Domini, et factum esset prandium bonum in domo Tobie, dixit filio suo: vade, et adduc aliquos de tribu nostra, timentes Deum, ut epulentur nobiscum.—Tob. ii. 1, 2.

<sup>2</sup> Deliciæ meæ esse cum filiis hominum.—Prov. viii. 31.

is able to countervail the goodness of his fidelity. A faithful friend is the medicine of life and immortality. He that hath found him hath found a treasure.”<sup>1</sup> Here the Holy Ghost speaks as of a rare thing; as if a true friend were hardly to be found on earth. How much more difficult then must it not be to find many who truly agree with each other in all things? If there were a city in which all the inhabitants lived without passion and self-interest, and in that harmony, meekness, friendship, and confidence that Our Lord recommends to the faithful, where nothing is ever done contrary to honesty, justice, decency, or the divine law, where each one truly loves his neighbor as himself: would not a city of that kind be looked on as a prodigy, and would not every one wish to live in it? But, alas! not only is there no city to be found in which the inhabitants live on such good terms with each other, but one could with reason fix a high price on even a single house in any town of which one could say with truth what Phocion the Athenian said of his when he was selling it: this house has good neighbors. Ah, there is difficulty enough in finding a family of which all the members live in love and harmony with each other, in which husband and wife, parents and children, masters and servants do not fight and quarrel.

Nor is this to be wondered at; men are the same everywhere; we are of contrary dispositions, humors, and inclinations. Every one has some faults and failings that give rise to disputes and trouble. One is clever, the other stupid; one is learned, the other ignorant; one is honest, the other crafty and cunning; one is amiable, the other obstinate; one is meek, the other quarrelsome; one is patient, the other passionate; one is humble, the other proud; one is generous, the other niggardly and sparing; one is virtuous and pious, the other wicked and godless; one is cheerful, the other melancholic. One wishes to be better than the other; to appear richer, nobler, more important than the other; no one likes to yield or give way to his neighbor. And this is properly the source from which spring all vexation, misunderstandings, quarrelings, and disunion. Moreover, if one is anxious to observe peace and charity, and to suit himself to the contrary dispositions of others, which is a great virtue, there are people who never leave one in peace; reckless men who

On account of the different tastes and inclinations of men.

<sup>1</sup> *Amico fideli nulla est comparatio; et non est digna ponderatio auri et argenti ad bonitatem fideli illius. Amicus fidelis medicamentum vitæ et immortalitatis. Qui autem invenit illum, invenit thesaurum.*—Ecclesi. vi. 15, 16, 14.

without the least shadow of reason are always seeking quarrels; envious men who cannot bear the sight of their neighbors, simply because they cannot find any fault in them; uncharitable men whose blighting tongues do not spare even the most virtuous; wicked men whose pleasure consists in doing mischief to others, and in putting a bad interpretation on even the holiest works and intentions.

On account  
of the differ-  
ence be-  
tween  
"mine" and  
"thine."  
Shown by a  
simile.

And besides all this, what often disturbs the harmony of even the best friends, and makes brothers and sisters hate each other, is that wretched "mine and thine;" "that cold-hearted word,"<sup>1</sup> as St. Chrysostom calls it. We are like fowls; sometimes a hen finds a piece of bread, or draws a worm out of the ground; up come the others immediately to take the bit out of her bill. She runs off, and the others after her; she is quite happy, while the others are envious of her good fortune; with all her good luck she has hardly time enough to enjoy her morsel in peace, while the others are just as uneasy and run after her. Now if the bread falls out of her bill, or as often happens, one of the others pulls half the worm away from her, then the tables are turned. She that lost her bit is sad, the other that has taken it is satisfied, but has as much to suffer as the former from the envy and pursuit of the others. The running and fighting go on as before; one wins and the other loses again; all are and remain uneasy, and fight with each other until the morsel is divided into little bits, or is with much difficulty swallowed by one of them; and then most frequently they go in search of something else. How is that? Because the worm or the piece of bread is not enough for all, and hence each one strives to get possession of it.

A source of  
disunion  
and misun-  
derstand-  
ing.

Christians! whence come quarrelings, misunderstandings, and disunion amongst neighbors, friends, and relations? From the fact that the morsels of worldly goods, about which we fight like fowls, are not enough to satisfy our greed. One has a larger morsel than another; the latter therefore is filled with hatred, envy, and grudging; one thinks that this or that belongs to him, or that a greater share of it is due to him; hence come quarrels and lawsuits, abuse and vilification, anger, hatred, ill-humor, inordinate ambition, and a host of other evils. Through want of Christian charity and meekness no one wishes to yield or give way to another, and thus loving intimacy and confidential re-

<sup>1</sup> Meum et tuum, frigidum illud verbum.

lations are disturbed even amongst the best of friends. Such is the power of that cold-hearted word, mine and thine.

Even if a few good friends understand each other perfectly as far as mine and thine are concerned, and enjoy each other's company, how long will that last? Ah, how easy it is for something to come between them and upset all their fondness! A cross look when one is not exactly in a good humor; a suspicion, a chance word taken up in a wrong sense, although it may have been well meant, is quite enough to put an end to all former confidence. Nay, the length of time that people know each other as friends, the frequency of their meetings and repeated conversations generally form a hindrance to love, as is so often the case with married people, whose love for each other should be most tender and constant. At first they think they have found a heaven on earth; for the first two, three, or four years they get on well enough, but after that love grows cold in many cases. Some go so far that they can hardly bear the sight of each other, and find nothing but a hard and intolerable cross in each other's society, although it should be a joy and consolation for them. Thus it is not in this vale of tears that we can find true and constant friendship and really agreeable society. No, my dear brethren; we must look elsewhere for that. O heaven! O holy city of Jerusalem! O dwelling of true love and lasting peace! Thou alone art that happy place where society of the most agreeable kind constitutes an indescribable joy and pleasure, and lasts forever! We shall consider this in the

Pleasant company is not of long duration on earth.

### Second Part.

And what sort of society is it? "Let us consider," says St. Augustine, "what the society of the blessed spirits is in itself." His opinion is that it is the occasion of such happiness that although we may form some idea of it from what we know of agreeable company on earth, we can never understand or comprehend it in this life: "No one in this life can form an adequate idea of the bliss of hearing the concerts of the angels, and of being in the company of the saints."<sup>1</sup> There have been occasionally on earth some great servants of God whose loss was able to fill a whole city with mourning. When the news was

In heaven alone are all the delights of pleasant company to be enjoyed in perfection.

<sup>1</sup> Contemplamur quid sit ipsa societas beatorum spirituum.—S. Aug. l. de spiritu et anima.

<sup>2</sup> Nemo in hac vita digne pensare potest, quanta sit illa suavitas, illud melos angelorum audire, sanctorum societatem habere.

spread in Alexandria that the holy Bishop Athanasius was banished, and the inhabitants knew that they should never again behold their beloved prelate, there was a commotion in the whole city, and the people ran into the streets crying out in loud and mournful tones: Athanasius! Athanasius! All the churches were filled with people who threw themselves on their knees to implore the divine mercy, and have their dear pastor restored to them. To this end the priests said Mass daily, and had public prayers; the virgins consecrated to God cried out for their spiritual father, the poor for their supporter, widows and orphans for their protector; the very hermits filled their caves with wailings and lamentations. On this occasion the great St. Anthony came out of his solitude and wrote to Constantine, begging of him to have some regard to his tears, and to the general wish of all good people, and to send them back their bishop, the object of such tender love to a large portion of the fold of Christ. Consider now, my dear brethren, if one servant of God, who was still a wanderer on earth and not yet adorned with the glory of heaven, was so much beloved by a whole city that the people found it impossible almost to live without him, how will it be then when we shall see all the saints in the kingdom of heaven in their immense glory and majesty, and shall always be in their company? The chief of this heavenly company is Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the world; next to Him is Mary, the blessed Mother of the Lord; after her come the principal courtiers and ministers of God, the holy angels distributed in nine choirs, the patriarchs, prophets, apostles, martyrs, confessors, virgins, and all the remaining elect, the multitude of whom, according to St. John, no one can number; all are now in glory, true kings and queens of heaven; all are most beautiful, holy, wise, good, friendly, amiable creatures, in whom there can never be the least imperfection, or fault, or failing, or inordinate passion. There, says the Venerable Bede, "no one is injured, no one angry, no one envies another, no cupidity is felt."<sup>1</sup> Thy society, O heavenly paradise! shall be wholly made up of holy friends of God who, renewed in mind and manners, adorned with all virtues, purged of all bad inclinations, freed from all error, live together and rejoice in the Lord, united with each other in the bonds of the most tender, true, and intimate affection, and with the greatest uniformity of will and heart; so that neither their mul-

<sup>1</sup> Nemo lædetur, irascetur nemo, nemo invidet, cupiditas nulla exardescet.



titude makes any disorder, nor does their high position give rise to pride, nor does difference of standing cause confusion, nor inequality envy; because the glory of heaven is enough for all and fully satisfies all: each one has as much as he can have and wishes to have. "God will be all in all,"<sup>1</sup> says St. Augustine. And because each one of the blessed possesses God entirely, each one has everything in God without any want. O most delightful acquaintanceship and society! O most agreeable conversation! Behold there the holy apostles Peter and Paul, the princes and chiefs of the Church! See St. Joseph, the foster-father of Our Lord! O ye holy martyrs and invincible warriors of Christ! show me your glorious wounds. St. Ambrose, tell me of the labor and trouble you had to overcome the Arian heretics and to refute their errors! St. Francis Xavier, tell me of the long and wearisome journeys you made by land and sea to convert so many thousand Indians! And if I wish to see saints from foreign lands, there is a number of Indians, Japanese, Chinese, Africans, Americans, who are all now fellow-citizens and happy inhabitants of the heavenly city Jerusalem. And what joy! O most beautiful and pleasing countenance of Mary! I shall behold and contemplate thee for all eternity! Most loving heart of Mary, I shall praise, love, and bless thee without end! O Mary! I shall thank thee, as I am bound to do, a thousand thousand times! I am here, I shall say; to my great joy, I am here at last. O great Queen of heaven! my Advocate, my dearest Mother! it is for many years now that I have been constantly receiving thy benefits and blessings in abundance, and that I have heard and spoken to others of the power given thee, of the unspeakable graces bestowed on thee above all mere creatures; but now I am with thee myself; I see thee with my own eyes, and am always in thy presence like a child with its mother. Oh, what joy and happiness! But still more than all I find here Thy sacred humanity, Jesus Christ, my Saviour! During my life I have often honored Thee in pictures and images; many thousand times I have reverently kissed Thy sacred wounds; I have often received Thee, God and Man, in the Most Blessed Sacrament of the Altar. But away with the dark veil of faith! Away with the appearance of bread and wine! O beautiful, bright wounds of Christ! I behold you now with my own eyes. O exceedingly comely countenance of my Saviour! never shall I cease to behold and

<sup>1</sup> *Erit Deus omnia in omnibus.*

contemplate thee. How happy and glad I am, and I shall remain so for all eternity!

The difference of merits shall not cause any jealousy there.

What do you think, my dear brethren, of this joyful company? True it is that the measure of joy in heaven shall correspond to the merits of each one, and he who has done more good on earth and amassed more merit shall be greater and higher in joy and glory, and shall be preferred to others. But this inequality shall not give rise to envy or discontent in those who receive a lesser degree of glory; for every one shall be quite satisfied with what he has, and have no wish to be raised higher. How is that? The Holy Ghost by the Wise Man gives me a beautiful simile to explain this. "All her domestics," and the inhabitants of the city of God, "are clothed with double garments."<sup>1</sup> What else are those double garments, asks Cardinal Hugo, but the glory of the soul and of the body?<sup>2</sup> They are all provided with a double garment of the same material; but how? In what manner are they different in glory? Just as the clothing of a grown-up man differs from that of a little child. See how the rich father acts who has several children to provide for; he gives each of them clothes of the same material, richly adorned, and embroidered with gold and silver; but does he have all the garments made of the same size? Not by any means. Why not? One child is taller and stouter than the others, and he must have clothes proportioned to his size. One requires eight ells of cloth, the other seven, the third six, and so on in proportion; one more, another less. Now ask the smallest of the children if he is dissatisfied because his coat has less cloth than that of his brother, and whether he is jealous of the other on that account, or would like to change with him. He will answer, no. But is not the larger garment of more value, worth more money than the smaller? True; yet as the little brother has a coat that suits him and looks well on him, he is content and does not want any other.

Because each one is content with his own glory. Shown by a simile.

So it is when several guests are sitting down to table to enjoy themselves. They all partake of the same food, and drink the same wine; yet according to the difference of health and appetite one is able to consume more than another. But no one is therefore envious of his neighbor because every one eats and drinks as much as he pleases. O chosen children and domes-

<sup>1</sup> Omnes domestici ejus vestiti sunt duplicibus.—Prov. xxxi. 21.

<sup>2</sup> Duplex vestis est duplex stola beatitudinis.

ties of God! in what desirable contentment and complete satisfaction you will live together in heaven! All partake of the same delicious banquet; all sit at the same table; all behold their God; all love their God; all possess their God; all rejoice in their God; and therefore all are clothed with the same precious garment of heavenly glory. Yet this garment is greater for one than for another, because it is suited to each one's stature, that is, to the amount of sanctifying grace and merit that each one has amassed on earth. But there will be neither jealousy nor dissatisfaction on that account; for every one shall be fully satisfied with what he has, nor will any one desire another's glory, since each one knows that more is not due to him, and would not suit him according to the measure of his merit.

Not only is there no jealousy, or envy, or discontent among the blessed, but, says St. Augustine, there is such a general, mutual love amongst them that each one rejoices at the glory of another as if it were his own; hence, "although the glory is different according to the difference of merit, yet the joy of all is general."<sup>1</sup> Similar is the experience of two who love each other truly, and eat and drink at the same table; each rejoices, not only because he likes his food, but also because he sees his companion enjoying himself too. Thus it is, continues St. Augustine, that each of the elect in heaven has as many joys as he has companions in glory, and since the number of the latter is almost uncountable, the joys of each one are innumerable. "In that perfect charity of innumerable angels and men, where no one loves another less than himself, the joys are countless,"<sup>2</sup> such are the words of the saint. With good reason does he say that the joys are countless; for by the mutual charity that animates them, the bliss of each will be increased as much as he sees it increased in each of his companions. "For each will rejoice at the happiness of the others as much as he does at his own unspeakable bliss; and he will have as many joys as he has companions."<sup>3</sup>

Nor must we imagine that any disturbance or disorder will arise on account of the vast number of the elect, as is the case on earth when too many guests sit down to table to enjoy them-

Nay, each one shall rejoice on account of the glory of the others.

The multitude of the elect shall not cause disorder,

<sup>1</sup> *Dispar est gloria singulorum, sed communis est lætitia omnium.*

<sup>2</sup> *In illa perfecta charitate innumerabilium angelorum et hominum, ubi nullus alium diligit minus quam seipsum, erit gaudium innumerable.*—S. Aug. l. de spiritu et anima.

<sup>3</sup> *Tantum enim unusquisque gaudebit de beatitudine alterius, quantum de suo gaudio ineffabili; et quot socios habebit, tot gaudia habebit.*

nor the length of time fatigue in this company.

selves, and there is such a clatter that, as the saying is, one can hardly hear himself talk. No; according to the words of St. John, "crying shall not be any more;"<sup>1</sup> there will be no shouting in heaven; all shall assemble in the most perfect order, and see and know each other clearly and completely as if they had been the most intimate friends on earth; and they shall associate with each other as pleasantly as if there were only two or three together. Nor will the length of time cause any weariness or fatigue in this society, as is so often the case with us on earth, because the friendship and love of the elect are founded on the immutable God. Thus through all eternity the joy of this banquet shall be as great and unchangeable as in the beginning. Oh, what bliss! Who shall understand it? Thus united and bound in the ties of the most tender love and affection, to live always with God, to associate with God as with a most dear friend!

So that the society of the blessed shall cause unspeakable happiness.

Poor heart! according to the words of the Holy Ghost, thou findest a great treasure on earth if thou hast even one well-meaning friend; how wilt thou then be able to grasp that treasure in heaven, when thou shalt possess in the most intimate friendship so many thousands of thousands of elect souls, so many millions of the most beautiful angels, the Mother of the Lord, and Christ Himself, the Son of God? O my God! what joy and happiness await me in that most blissful and delightful society! If I am now so attracted by the friendly words of a mortal man whose manners are affable and whose company I love, being assured moreover that he means well with me, how will it be when I see myself surrounded for eternity by so many friends who have all the same intentions and inclinations as I, who are all one heart with me, whom I shall love most perfectly from the bottom of my heart, and who shall all most certainly love me in the same manner? who shall rejoice because it is well with me as I shall rejoice at their good fortune? who shall intone with me as with one mouth the undying song of jubilee: "Let us be glad and rejoice, and give glory to Him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come?"<sup>2</sup> Alleluia! True are thy words, O holy Prophet David: "Blessed are they that dwell in Thy house, O Lord! they shall praise Thee forever and ever,"<sup>3</sup> and rejoice with Thee!

<sup>1</sup> Neque clamor erit ultra.—Apoc. xxi. 4.

<sup>2</sup> Gaudemus et exultamus; et demus gloriam ei; quia venerunt nuptiæ Agni.—Ibid. xix. 7.

<sup>3</sup> Beati qui habitant in domo tua, Domine: in sæcula sæculorum laudabunt te.—Ps. lxxxiii. 5.

My dear brethren, shall all of us who are here present be together in that happy society? Ah, if things turn out as we hope and trust, how shall we not congratulate each other, and exult and rejoice, that we at all events have all found our way without exception to the heavenly marriage-feast! Eh? he is no good who keeps away when true friends meet, as the old saying has it; and wo to that one of us who so lives as to be excluded from that heavenly society! Therefore as long as we are all here together, let us all serve God faithfully, give up that bad company that has hitherto kept us from good and led us into sin; let us now renounce that wicked intimacy, sustained by unlawful love, that has been such a hindrance to our returning to God with our whole hearts. Away out of the house with the person who has been an occasion of sin to me! I shall see and know you no longer; and we shall both of us bewail our blindness and wickedness, that we may meet and see each other in heaven. At once I will leave the house in which unlawful proposals have been made to me, in which I have been tempted to offend God grievously; never more shall I set foot therein, even if I have to suffer temporal loss and seek my bread elsewhere. Now let us avoid and shun dangerous company in which even the least stain might be attached to our hearts and consciences; those nightly gatherings in which, amid dancing and other amusements, the vain world endangers the purity of young people of both sexes. We shall say to ourselves: will this company be a consolation to me at the hour of death? If not, then I shall have nothing to do with it. I will rejoice, but in the Lord, as becomes the children of God, so that my conscience may remain pure and unstained. In heaven I shall have a perpetual feast; I shall console myself with that hope and reserve all my enjoyment till then. Now let us live in Christian unity and charity, and bear each other's faults and shortcomings with meekness and patience, pardon all injuries, and say to ourselves: all men are my neighbors, my brothers and sisters, whom I hope to have as companions in heaven; therefore I will love them all as myself according to the law of my Saviour, that we may be one day together forever. If a premature death separates one good friend from another, husband from wife, wife from husband, little children from their parents, why should you weep so much for that, and give way to such inordinate grief? Think for your consolation: they are gone before into the eternal dwelling, which is

Conclusion  
and exhortation to  
shun bad  
company, to  
love one  
another,  
and to serve  
God truly.

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also the end of my journey; they await my coming; there in heaven we shall see each other again and remain together forever. Now let us frequent those holy companies of pious Christians who assemble in church to hear the word of God, or to praise God with united voices in public devotions. Thus we shall here in this vale of tears begin the occupation that shall keep us employed for eternity in the heavenly country, where in the holiest of all companies, amidst endless joys and pleasures, we shall love, praise, and magnify the God of infinite beauty for all eternity. Amen.

*Another introduction to the same sermon for the first Sunday after Epiphany.*

### Text.

*Descendit cum eis, et venit Nazareth.*—Luke ii. 51.

“He went down with them and came to Nazareth.”

### Introduction.

What consolation and joy it must have been to the heart of Mary, the Virgin Mother of Jesus, and to the heart of Joseph, His foster-father, to see increasing in age and stature, and exciting the wonder and admiration of all men by His wisdom and knowledge, the divine and more than blessed Child, longed for by heaven and earth, whom they had always looked after and cared for, with whom they had been constantly, whom they had carried in their arms and borne on their knees! We can understand the joy caused by the presence of Jesus from the great grief they experienced when they lost Him for three days. Ah, if one could have even a glimpse of the holy house at Nazareth, and see what that holy company did, hear what they said, and know how they spent the time! Truly, if there ever was a paradise on earth, it was that family in which Jesus, the Son of God, Mary, the Mother of God, and Joseph, the foster-father of God lived together. On earth, etc. *Continues as above.*

*FIFTY-FIRST SERMON.*

**ON THE ETERNITY OF THE JOYS OF HEAVEN.**

**Subject.**

1. In the kingdom of heaven alone shall all joys be eternal;  
2. In the kingdom of heaven alone shall the elect be certain and assured that their joys shall last forever. Therefore in heaven alone is the true and perfect happiness that we should all strive for.—*Preached on the feast of All Saints.*

**Text.**

*Gaudete, et exultate; quoniam merces vestra copiosa est in cœlis.*  
—Matt. v. 12.

“Be glad and rejoice, for your reward is very great in heaven.”

**Introduction.**

To-day all heaven opens itself before the eyes of our minds, and exhibits to us the countless hosts of the saints of God, who there rejoice with Him in all imaginable pleasures, and cry out to us who still sigh in this wretched vale of tears, and call to us, and invite us to follow them, that we too may one day be their companions in happiness. O heaven! O land of joy! O glorious dwelling of the saints! ah, would that we were there! But supposing we go there, as we hope, how long shall we be there to rejoice together? In this world there are wretched, miserable pleasures; when we think we have caught one of them we find that it has come to an end; at one moment this is wanting, at another that; never is our joy complete. “Be glad and rejoice, for your reward is very great in heaven.” Faithful servants of God, a far different festival awaits you! You shall find it in the kingdom of heaven, where all imaginable delights of body, as well as of soul, are prepared for you to your full satisfaction by the Almighty God, as we have seen in different meditations during the course of the year. And, best of all, never shall there be decrease or end of all those delights; they shall last forever without change. This we shall now consider by way of further encouragement in the service of God.

## Plan of Discourse.

*In the kingdom of heaven alone shall all joys be eternal; the first part. In the kingdom of heaven alone shall the elect be certain and assured that their joys shall last forever; the second part. Therefore in heaven alone is the true and perfect happiness that we should make the sole object of our efforts.*

Let that be the conclusion with Thy grace, Jesus Christ. King of glory, through the intercession of Mary and of all Thy angels and saints.

Everything on earth is changeable and transitory.

Everything that ends with time, no matter how delightful and agreeable it may be, cannot fully content or satisfy the human soul which is created immortal by God and capable of possessing an infinite Good. Hence when things go well with men we hear that wish and longing desires so often repeated: Oh, would that it might be so always! would that I might be always as well as I am now! that I might always have such pleasant company! always enjoy this pleasure, this comfort! always live in repose, content, and consolation! But in vain is this wish on earth. All that is in us, all that is outside of us is changeable, inconstant, and very transitory. "The days of man are short," sighs out holy Job, speaking of our misery; "who cometh forth like a flower and is destroyed, and fleeth as a shadow, and never continueth in the same state."<sup>1</sup> We experience the truth of this daily and almost hourly; at one moment we are joyful, at another sad; we laugh and weep by turns; to-day we are of good heart and courage, to-morrow downcast and miserable; repose is followed by care and sorrow; health by weakness and sickness, and finally by death. "For what is your life?" asks the apostle St. James with reason. "It is a vapor which appeareth for a little while, and afterwards shall vanish away."<sup>2</sup>

Pleasures, especially, last a very short time.

So it is with the other goods of this world, which are exterior to us, and are founded on the short span of human life. If you find pleasure in eating and drinking, how long does it last? As long as the appetite is not satiated; when that point is reached, the choicest viands cause disgust. You hear or see something pleasing; how long does your pleasure last? Not longer than the soothing sound resounds in the ears, the pleasing object

<sup>1</sup> Breves dies hominis sunt. Qui quasi flos egreditur, et conteritur, et fugit velut umbra, et nunquam in eodem statu permanet.—Job xiv. 5, 2.

<sup>2</sup> Quæ est enim vita vestra? Vapor est ad modicum parens, et deinceps exterminabitur.—James iv. 15.



remains before the eyes. You find the love and affection of some creature a source of delight and joy to you: for how long? Until mutual love has grown cold, or sickness attacks the beloved one, or death removes him altogether. Then there is an end of all joy, and sorrow comes in its stead. Do you set your happiness in the possession of riches? Ah, how soon an unforeseen loss or an accident can put an end to it! And if you are spared that, death must inevitably come like a thief and steal everything from you at once; a wooden coffin will then be all that shall remain to you of all your earthly goods. "See," says St. Augustine, "how fleeting that happiness is;"<sup>1</sup> the beginning of it is almost the end too.

And that it is which embitters the apparent happiness of all the vain children of the world who seek after empty things, namely, that they cannot make everlasting the joys in which they take delight. We often think how happy that monarch must be who has everything his heart can desire, and abounds in pleasures day and night. And if it were as we imagine, would he not prize his honors, wealth, and pleasures much more if they were never to end, if no grave yawned for him, if he could remain as he is forever? But there is a sharp thorn that he must always wear inside his crown; all must come to an end in a short time. In order to satisfy in some measure this desire for an everlasting good, there are men who endeavor to hand down their names and renown to future generations. To that end beautiful palaces and pillars and triumphal arches are erected on which their pictures, names, and escutcheons are carved, so that after their bodies are decayed the lifeless stone may keep their memory green in after ages; others write books in order to secure immortality in the printed page; others leave their portraits behind them in medals of copper, silver, or gold, that after their death they may remain always in the memory of men.

But all this is of no good; for even the memory of men lasts but a short time on earth. "Their memory hath perished with a noise,"<sup>2</sup> says the Prophet David of such people; with the death-knell that tolls for their burial all remembrance of them is blotted out and vanished. That gentleman, that lady is dead, the people say; there is two, three, four days' talk about them, and after that their names are not even mentioned. No one speaks of them again, and perhaps there may be two or three

Men would willingly make their happiness everlasting, or at least hand down their names to posterity.

But to no purpose, for after a time they are forgotten.

<sup>1</sup> Ecce volaticam felicitatem.

<sup>2</sup> Perit memoria eorum cum sonitu.—Ps. lx. 7.

who even think of them. When a hundred years have passed the stone pillars fall down; time eats away the names and escutcheons, and even if these remain uninjured there is no one living who pays any attention to them. It is as if one wrote his name in the dust to have it blown away by the first puff of wind. So speaks the Prophet: "Like the dust, which the wind driveth from the face of the earth;"<sup>1</sup> or like a mighty tree, which with its wide-spreading branches occupies a great space of ground; when it is cut down it makes a great crash; but if you go a few days afterwards to the place where it stood, you will hardly know it had ever been there. The workmen have cut it into pieces, and brought it to their master to be burnt to ashes; and here again the Prophet supplies us with a simile: "I have seen the wicked highly exalted, and lifted up like the cedars of Libanus. And I passed by, and lo he was not: and I sought him, and his place was not found."<sup>2</sup> So that everything in this world is transitory. "Vanity of vanities, and all things are vanity;"<sup>3</sup> words wrung out of Solomon, who as it were swam in a sea of all imaginable worldly goods and pleasures, and wrung out of him by experience. Therefore there is nothing on earth that can satisfy and fully content the immortal soul.

The joys  
of heaven  
shall be  
everlasting.

The dwelling of the elect in heaven alone is that most happy place of perfect joys, of which the angel Gabriel said to the Blessed Virgin, when announcing to her that she was to be the Mother of God: "Of His kingdom there shall be no end."<sup>4</sup> And as it is said of the wicked on the last day: "These shall go into everlasting punishment," so shall it be said of the just, "but the just into life everlasting."<sup>5</sup> We read that in the creation of the world God did not rest till the seventh day: "He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done."<sup>6</sup> Why was that? Was it because He had come to the end of His work? No, says St. Anselm; but because that day was a figure and image of heavenly glory. In the history of all the other days mention is made of morning and evening: "And there was evening and morning, one day;"<sup>7</sup> "and the evening and morning were the second day," the third, the fourth, the fifth,

<sup>1</sup> Tanquam pulvis, quem projicit ventus a facie terræ.—Ps. i. 4.

<sup>2</sup> Vidi implum superexaltatum, et elevatum sicut cedros Libani. Et transivi, et ecce non erat; et quasiivi eum, et non est inventus locus ejus.—Ibid. xxxvi. 35, 36.

<sup>3</sup> Vanitas vanitatum, et omnia vanitas.—Eccles. xii. 8.

<sup>4</sup> Regni ejus non erit finis.—Luke i. 33.

<sup>5</sup> Ibunt hi in supplicium æternum: justi autem in vitam æternam.—Matt. xxv. 46.

<sup>6</sup> Requievit die septimo ab universo opere, quod patrarat.—Gen. ii. 2.

<sup>7</sup> Factumque est vespere et mane, dies unus.—Ibid. i. 5.

the sixth day. But this is not said of the seventh day, because it is a symbol of eternity, a day without evening, a day without end, to signify that on the day of glory the just shall repose with God without end. "As the Sabbath, on which God rested, is not said to have had an evening, so the repose of the just shall not have an end."<sup>1</sup> Such are the words of St. Anselm.

And this it is that will perfect the happiness of the elect; they shall enjoy with their God in heaven all imaginable pleasures of soul and body, as we have seen already; that is a great deal indeed to say; but we have not yet said enough. The chief and most necessary constituent of perfect happiness is that all these pleasures shall never cease; they shall last forever, and never come to an end: "The just shall live for evermore; and their reward is with the Lord, and the care of them with the Most High,"<sup>2</sup> whose kingdom and glory as a reward shall never end. The soul shall rejoice in the clear knowledge of all things, natural as well as supernatural; and this blissful knowledge shall last for all eternity, without end and without fatigue. It shall rejoice in the clear knowledge and vision of the God of infinite beauty, and this vision shall last without intermission for eternity. It shall rejoice in the most perfect love of God, and know that its love is returned in the most tender manner, and this happy love shall last without change for all eternity. The bodily eyes shall see in heaven, the ears hear, the smell, taste, and touch perceive all that can delight and ravish those senses, and these delights shall be without intermission, without end for all eternity. The blessed in heaven shall enjoy each other's society, and this joyous company shall last without interruption or change of mind for all eternity. The blessed in heaven shall be with their God as with a most intimate friend, and this joyous intimacy shall persevere without end or cessation for all eternity. "The just shall be in everlasting remembrance,"<sup>3</sup> and in the perpetual friendship of God.

Hence its happiness shall be most perfect.

O eternity of heavenly joys! what art thou? O my God! is this true? It is now fifty-four years since I began to serve Thee. But what am I saying? That is the length of time that Thou hast given me life on earth! In all these years,—ah, how late it

And this eternal happiness we earn in this short life of ours.

<sup>1</sup> Sicut sabbatum, in quo Deus requievit, non legitur habuisse vesperam; sic requies justorum non habebit finem.

<sup>2</sup> Justi autem in perpetuum vivent, et apud Dominum est merces eorum, et cogitatio eorum apud Altissimum.—Wis. v. 16.

<sup>3</sup> In memoria æterna erit justus.—Ps. cxi. 7.

was when I began to know and love Thee truly!—in all these years how few days I can reckon in which I have served Thee properly! If I were now to die in Thy sanctifying grace and friendship, should I rejoice with Thee in Thy kingdom of heaven for all eternity as a return for such a short and ill-rendered service? Truly, I should enter into the joy of my Lord! But when I shall have enjoyed this reward for a hundred, a thousand, a hundred thousand, a hundred thousand million years, will there be no end to my reward even then? No; it will last for eternity. And when I shall have been happy with Thee for as many countless millions of years as would be denoted by a number so great as to fill the whole firmament with figures, at the end of that time, shall I continue as before to have the same joy with Thee in heaven? Yes; “of His kingdom there shall be no end;” the kingdom of the elect of God, like that of God Himself, shall never come to an end. As long as God shall be God, so long shall the elect rejoice with their God in heaven, so long shall their pleasures and delights last without causing them the least weariness.

How generous our God is to give an eternal reward for such a short service!

Ah, Christians, what a generous and liberal Rewarder we have! What an exceeding great return we have to expect if we serve our God diligently! And how long must we serve Him? asks St. Augustine. An eternal reward should justly be paid for by an eternal service and labor; but see how little God asks from us. If He said to you: serve Me for a hundred thousand times a thousand years in labor and suffering, and I will give you heaven, would He ask too much? Ah, that service compared to heaven is as nothing, and even then we should have reason to wonder at the goodness and generosity of God in giving such an exceeding great reward for such a small service. For the hundred thousand times a thousand years would come to an end some time, but the heavenly joys prepared as a reward for it last forever. Now the Lord does not say to you: serve Me for a hundred thousand times a thousand years; He does not say: serve Me for a hundred years, but: serve Me as long as you live; whether your life is long or short makes no difference to Me; let it come to an end in a year, or in half a year, or in a month, or this very day, I will be satisfied with your work. Only serve Me during that short time; love Me so as to do nothing against My will and divine law, and as a reward I will give you eternal joys in the kingdom of heaven. O good God! what an exceeding great reward Thou bestowest for such a short service! O my

Saviour! with reason may I ponder on the words 'Thou didst address to Thy servant as he was meditating on Thy sufferings before the crucifix: "Often think to yourself: oh, how little! oh, how much!"' How little is what I have to do and to suffer for Thy sake! How much I shall gain as a reward! For almost a nothing Thou wilt make me happy, and happy for all eternity! O happiness! O eternal happiness! Here words fail me, like St. Chrysostom, who, ravished out of himself, as it were, by this same meditation, could say nothing else but: O heaven! what art thou not worth? O most perfect joy! of which one can say that it will never come to an end, what should one not do to gain thee? Yes, my dear brethren; not only shall all the joys of heaven be everlasting in themselves, but what fully completes the happiness of the elect, the blessed in heaven shall be certain and assured that their happiness shall last forever. This we shall briefly consider in the

### Second Part.

How can the possession of a great good contribute to my happiness if I do not know that I own it, or otherwise am not sure of owning it for a long time? The royal prince, who is still in the cradle, is really the heir to a great and rich kingdom; but as he neither knows nor understands anything of this, how can it help to make him happy? The beggar's child is just as contented and joyful, although it will spend its life in poverty; it laughs as gaily when one sings to or plays with it; and the prince's child cries just as hard as the beggar's when it is hurt. Neither of them knows anything of poverty or wealth, and hence neither is glad or sorry on account of its state. Generally speaking, the hope of enjoying a long life on earth in health and prosperity makes glad the heart of man; how would it be if we could be quite sure and certain of such good fortune? If an angel had appeared to Mathusala in his youth and told him that he should live to be more than nine hundred years of age, he might have said to himself to his great satisfaction: what a fine time I have still to live on earth! I can have many a pleasant day before I need fear the approach of death. He lived indeed to a great age, but as he was a mortal man, and as such had to be in hourly and momentary expectation of death, the long life that was before him could not have been a great source of con-

He who is not sure of his happiness cannot be happy.

<sup>1</sup> *Sæpe cogita! o quam parum! o quam multum!*

solation to him. And here again we have the cause of the bitterness that spoils the poor and mean pleasures that we sometimes enjoy on this earth: namely, that we do not know for certain how long we can enjoy them. All that can give us enjoyment here is short-lived; if the pleasure lasts an hour, we are not sure even of that hour. Every hour makes us afraid that the end is coming; every moment we must be in dread of death. And the greater and more agreeable the good we possess, the greater too is our fear of losing it.

Even the elect would not be happy if they were not sure of their happiness.

My dear brethren, to inherit the eternal kingdom of heaven, always without end to live with God in the abode of joy—oh, what happiness! what immense good fortune! The mere hope and confidence of going to heaven is the greatest consolation, and one that really sweetens our labor and trouble, our suffering and misery, in this mortal life; I rejoice in this hope whenever I think of it. Ah, let each one think to himself: if God were now to say to me: you will save your soul, you will go to heaven and be happy with Me forever, how could I contain myself through sheer joy and satisfaction at this assurance? If I might say like Job: “I know that my Redeemer liveth... and in my flesh I shall see my God?”<sup>1</sup> I am certain of it; God has said it; not only do I hope this, but this certainty is laid up in my bosom; I shall surely go to heaven! But as it is, I have to waver between hope and fear, and the greater my wish and desire to be eternally happy, the greater my dread of being disappointed through the sins that I may still commit. O chosen saints of God! you are beyond all this doubt and anxiety; you are already in heaven, and are actually enjoying everlasting delights! But how would it be with you if you did not know how long your happiness is to last? if uncertainty filled you with the fear of losing the kingdom of joy and the vision of God that you now have? Oh, my dear brethren, in that case there would be an end to the happiness of the elect, and heaven could no longer be called the abode of bliss; for, as theologians teach, happiness to be perfect must have two qualities: it must be eternal in itself, and also eternal in the memory and sure knowledge of the blessed. If this latter condition were wanting, there would not be complete happiness in heaven; for the greater the bliss caused by the beatific vision and the possession of the immense goods of heaven, the greater too

<sup>1</sup> Scio quod Redemptor meus vivit... et in carne mea videbo Deum meum.—Job xix. 25, 26.

would be the sorrow and anxiety caused by the fear of losing it.

But hope, fear, doubt, away with you! there is no room for you in heaven! Its joys shall be eternal, and the blessed shall moreover be eternally certain that their happiness shall never end. We have the infallible words of Our Lord for this: "Your joy no man shall take from you;"<sup>1</sup> and the blessed see clearly in the beatific vision that this assurance is actually fulfilled, and shall be fulfilled most certainly forever; and each of them can say to himself: I am in heaven, and of my kingdom there shall be no end. Truly, if the greatest torment of the damned in hell is their knowledge that their pains shall be eternal and their fire never quenched, so that they in their despair are always cursing and blaspheming God, on the other hand the joys of the elect in heaven must be increased in no mean degree by the certain knowledge they have of the eternity of their happiness, and they are happy, not only on account of the delights they actually enjoy, but also on account of the pleasures that are to come to them during eternity. For as a foreseen sorrow that is to assail me to-morrow already troubles me to-day, so a foreseen good and happiness that is to fall to my lot to-morrow fills me with joy to-day in anticipation. From this it follows that the blessed in heaven, since they are at each and every moment sure of the eternity of their happiness, enjoy during each and every moment of their existence an eternity of joys together, as if all eternity were present at once in their minds.

This assurance greatly increases their bliss, so that in every moment they have the happiness of eternity.

In olden times it was the custom in Germany not to put more than one dish on the table at a time; when that was finished, a second was placed, and then a third, and so on; thus one could not have more than one kind of food at a time. But now they bring everything, or nearly everything on at once, so that the guests can delight their eyes and please their appetites with all the dishes at once. Here on earth, as far as pleasures are concerned, we eat, so to speak, in the old German style; one joy follows the other; if we are to-day gay and cheerful, we know not what may come to-morrow, or the day after, or still later on; thus each time we enjoy only the present pleasure. But in heaven the dishes shall not be brought in one by one, but all together. Since the elect are sure and certain of an undisturbed eternity, they have all the joys of heaven together, the present as well as the future, and so they shall have them forever. Oh,

Shown by a simile.

<sup>1</sup> *Gaudium vestrum nemo tollet a vobis.*—John xvi. 22.

what a happy state, to live in all imaginable delights, to live in all imaginable delights forever, and for every moment of eternity to taste and enjoy all imaginable delights at one and the same time!

Conclusion  
to serve God  
here in or-  
der to gain  
eternal re-  
ward.

My dear brethren, take this well to heart; we know and daily experience that everything that seems good on this earth is but a transitory thing that must soon pass away; we are, at the same time, assured by our faith that in the future life the joys that await us as a reward shall last for all eternity; and yet those transitory, uncertain, momentary goods and pleasures often make us forget the eternal ones and actually barter them away. Can we imagine anything more senseless and stupid? What is become of us? Where is our reason if we give up heaven for a forbidden pleasure or some temporal gain? We know and experience that our lives on earth are confined within very narrow limits, so that we cannot promise ourselves even one hour of life, and at the same time we are assured by our faith that the next life shall last forever, either in the pains of hell or in the joys of heaven. And yet what trouble, and labor, and expense we go to! what care we take when we are ill to prolong for a little while this uncertain life of ours, and to stave off for a time the death we dread! What trouble and labor then should we not justly undergo to avoid the eternal death of hell, and to gain an eternal, joyful life in heaven? And would not this latter be worth the trouble and labor? We know and experience that the good works that we perform with a supernatural intention, the crosses and trials that we bear patiently and resignedly for God's sake, last only a very short time; oh, how short it is! And we know surely and certainly too by our faith that the reward promised us for these things in heaven shall not come to an end for all eternity; oh, how much it is! Come, then! let us perform these works with all possible diligence, bear adversity with contentment, and say to ourselves: this good work that I now give to my God is soon done; the pain, the torment, the sickness, the cross that I am suffering will soon be over; the heavenly joys that are to come shall never end. Therefore I will cheerfully invest the temporal capital that is to bring me in an eternal interest.

And cheer-  
fully to  
face all  
difficulties

If we now and then find a difficulty in keeping the commandments of God and the Gospel laws of Jesus Christ, such as, for instance, forgiving our enemies from our hearts, and doing good



to them, restoring ill-gotten goods to their lawful owner, re-<sup>in the hope</sup>  
nouncing unlawful intimacy, abstaining from forbidden pleasures,<sup>of it.</sup> abolishing abuses at the cost of a certain amount of self-denial, and so on, let us think as the Theban ambassador of whom Ælianns writes. This ambassador was sent to the king of Persia, and as he was about to have an audience of that monarch he was informed that at his first entry into the royal chamber he had to fall on his knees and do homage to the king, an homage that seemed to him unworthy of his high office and of the person who had sent him. Very well, he answered; bring me to the king. As soon as he entered the chamber he drew a ring from his finger and purposely let it fall on the ground; he then bent down and picked it up. Thus he appeared to the king to have performed the required act of homage, but he said to himself as he was stooping down: "this is not for you, but for the ring."<sup>1</sup> So let us too act, my dear brethren. It is hard for me to forgive that man who has injured and insulted me so often, to show him a friendly countenance, to greet him courteously, to be a true friend to him; yet I will do it; I will overcome myself; I will be the first to offer friendship and reconciliation; *non tibi, sed annulo*—not for your sake, but for the ring of heavenly immortality. It is difficult to give up that property which I have had for such a long time, and to restore it to its rightful owner; yet not for your sake, but for the ring of everlasting riches shall it leave my hands this very day. It is better for me to be poor for a short time than to lose heaven forever. It is difficult to put away that person whom I have so dearly loved hitherto, and to renounce all intercourse with her; it is difficult to abstain from those carnal pleasures that I have so frequently indulged in; yet it must and shall be done; *non tibi, sed annulo*; for the sake of a happy eternity, a blissful heaven! When I am tempted to sin I shall remember the words, "The delight is momentary, the torment eternal."<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, when there is question of bearing the cross and suffering, I shall say to myself: "The torment is momentary, the delight eternal," which after I have suffered with patience is prepared for me by the Almighty. This latter I shall try to gain that I may rejoice in heaven forever. Amen.

<sup>1</sup> Non tibi, sed annulo.

<sup>2</sup> Momentaneum quod delectat; æternum quod cruciat.

174 *On Gaining an Increase of Heavenly Glory.*

*Another introduction to the same sermon for the second  
Sunday after Epiphany.*

**Text.**

*Deficiente vino, dicit mater Jesu ad eum: vinum non habent.*—  
John ii. 3.

“And the wine failing, the Mother of Jesus saith to Him:  
They have no wine.”

**Introduction.**

Joyous the wedding-feast at which Jesus and Mary were present; but it must have been a feast of poor people, since the necessary drink was wanting, and the merriment disturbed thereby. So it is in the world, my dear brethren; when we think we have secured a pleasure, we find ourselves disappointed; at one moment this is wanting, at another that; never is our joy complete, never a pleasure lasting. Rejoice, faithful servants of God; a far different feast awaits you, etc. *Continues as above.*

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*FIFTY-SECOND SERMON.*

**ON GAINING AN INCREASE OF HEAVENLY GLORY  
IN THIS LIFE.**

**Subject.**

First, we can always add to our future glory in heaven; what a great advantage that is. Secondly, in what this increase of glory of one blessed soul above another consists.—*Preached on the thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost.*

**Text.**

*Et factum est, dum irent mundati sunt.*—Luke xvii. 14.

“And it came to pass, as they went they were made clean.”

**Introduction.**

Why were those ten lepers obliged to go to the priests in order to be made clean? Was not Jesus Christ the Almighty God, who with one word could free them at once from their loathsome disease, as He did with the leper in the Gospel of St. Matthew, who came to Him and said: “Lord, if Thou wilt Thou

canst make me clean," and the merciful Saviour at once granted his request: "And Jesus, stretching forth His hand, touched him, saying: I will. Be thou made clean. And forthwith his leprosy was cleansed."<sup>1</sup> Why did He send those ten lepers to the priests? To show that He does not always wish to dispense His graces and gifts immediately, but that in order to receive them we must do our part of the work. "And it came to pass, as they went they were made clean." My dear brethren, God might of Himself alone free us from our past sins, but He does not do so in the present arrangements of His providence, since we must contribute our share too; namely, repenting of our sins and confessing them to the priest. God could of Himself alone make us eternally happy, but He does not wish to do so, since we have to work with Him, and by diligently practising virtue gain heaven as a reward. Yet that is a circumstance that should cause us to rejoice, for thus by our own efforts we may ascend higher in heaven, and by our work here on earth make our future glory there all the greater. This consideration should encourage us to practise good works daily and without giving way to weariness, for we can say to ourselves: heaven, everlasting joy and glory, could any labor or trouble be too much for me to possess and increase you! To the end that we may have thoughts of the kind always ready to arise in our minds, we shall make the glory of heaven the subject of this and the following instructions, not considering that glory as it is in itself, but a matter which you probably have not yet heard treated in a sermon, how it can be constantly and indeed easily increased during this life if we only wish to do so. We take the first point to-day.

#### Plan of Discourse.

*That we can always add to our future glory in heaven, and what a great advantage that is; the first point. In what consists this increase of the glory of one blessed soul above another; the second point.*

Jesus Christ, King of glory, who didst come down from heaven on this earth to make us heirs of Thy glory, fill our hearts with the desire of the joys Thou hast prepared for us, that we may daily labor in Thy service with unwearied zeal, and thus mount higher and higher in heaven! This we beg of Thee

<sup>1</sup> Domine, si vis, potes me mundare. Extendens Jesus manum, tetigit eum, dicens: volo. Mundare. Et confestim mundata est lepra ejus.—Matt. viii. 2, 3.

through the merits of Mary, the Queen of heaven, and our holy guardian angels.

As far as the substance of happiness is concerned, it is the same for all the elect.

The substance and essence of perfect happiness and of the eternal glory that is prepared for us in heaven consists properly, as we have frequently seen already, in the perfect possession and enjoyment of the supreme Good through the beatific vision, and the perfect love of God and peaceful joy in God that spring from this vision. This glory is essentially the same with all the elect in heaven; for they all see their God clearly, all love Him with their whole hearts, all rejoice in Him eternally, and thus all are happy together in the perfect possession and enjoyment of the supreme Good.

Yet there is a difference according to the difference of merit.

Meanwhile St. Paul, writing to the Corinthians, says: "One is the glory of the sun, another the glory of the moon, and another the glory of the stars. For star differeth from star in glory. So also is the resurrection of the dead."<sup>1</sup> His meaning is that just as one star differs from another in brilliancy, so in the resurrection of the dead the elect shall differ from each other in glory; so that although they shall all see God, yet it shall not be in the same manner, but one shall behold and possess Him more, another less, and in that way one shall have more glory than the other. The reason of this is because glory shall be measured out according to the degree of merit and the sanctifying grace accumulated by merit, and on that scale it shall be apportioned out and appropriated to each one for eternity. Now as the merits and sanctifying grace of the living on earth are greater or less, so also must the reward and glory of the blessed in heaven who have attained their end be different. Who can doubt that the glory of Mary, the great Mother of God, is incomparably greater than that of any of the seraphim or any other saint? That the glory of St. Peter or St. Paul far excels that of the newly-baptized infant who died in its cradle after having received the sacrament? That the glory of the first martyr, Stephen, or of St. Jerome, who wore his life away in penitential austerities, is much greater than that of the penitent thief who was justified by repenting of his sins in the last moment of his life? No; not only among the choirs of the heavenly spirits, where one choir of the angels is distinguished from the other, are there various degrees of excellence, but also among the saints there will be a similar difference and

<sup>1</sup> *Alla claritas solis, alla claritas lune, alla claritas stellarum. Stella enim a stella differt in claritate. Sic et resurrectio mortuorum.*—I. Cor. xv. 41, 42.

## *On Gaining an Increase of Heavenly Glory. 177*

variety, according as one surpasses the other in glory and brightness.

But, as we have seen already, this diversity does not occasion the least dissatisfaction among the elect, because in the state of perfect happiness there is no room for envy or sadness, since all love each other perfectly and rejoice in each other's happiness just as they do in their own; and that because each one knows that a higher degree of glory than he enjoys would not be suitable or becoming for him; therefore each one is quite content with his state.

From this it follows that as each one can add more and more to his merits on earth daily, hourly, nay, every moment by sanctifying grace, so also can he increase more and more his future glory in heaven and add to it almost infinitely. Degrees and dignities in heaven are on a far different footing from those on earth, where in a few steps we can reach the summit. Citizens, counsellors, nobles, counts, princes, kings, emperors, monarchs, there you have the whole of our earthly dignities, and no one may mount higher. But in heaven the ladder is endless in length; no matter how high you may go, you will never come to the last round, so that you shall be able to say: now I am at the top, and cannot go higher. No; the good we shall possess in heaven is the infinite God, an uncreated, immense, fathomless ocean of all imaginable delights and joys; no matter how deep you drink of it there will always remain more and more delights that can be enjoyed by a greater light of glory. Thus by increasing my merits and growing constantly in sanctifying grace I can become not only equal to the angels in heavenly glory, but can far surpass the angels, archangels, cherubim, and seraphim, and after I have accumulated merit to that extent, there are still higher and higher degrees beyond all the choirs of angels to which I might ascend if my life were prolonged and I continued to add to my merits. O Christians! what a happiness for us poor mortals if we only rightly consider the matter! What a priceless benefit the good God has bestowed on us in creating us for such a high and noble end, preserving our lives, and placing us in the state by which, if we wish, we may attain such great happiness! Ah, should we not be fired by a noble emulation and vie with each other in adding more and more to this eternal happiness?

For what an immense, indescribable good is such an increase! The least

A difference, however, that does not cause jealousy.

Hence one can here make his future glory always greater and greater.

## 178 *On Gaining an Increase of Heavenly Glory.*

degree of  
heavenly  
glory is an  
almost in-  
finite good.

St. Thomas of Aquin and St. Chrysostom, speaking of sanctifying grace, say that the least degree of heavenly glory, such as that apportioned to a child who dies just after baptism, is an immensely greater and more precious good than all possible goods of the whole world, even if God were to create millions of new worlds, and fill them with all sorts of delights; so that if the choice were given me between the supreme authority of all these worlds, with all the power, dignity, wealth, and pleasure that can be imagined in order to enable me to fill such a position, for not a hundred but a thousand millions of years in perfect peace, without trouble or annoyance of any kind; if I had to choose between this and the very lowest degree of glory in heaven, then without the least hesitation, if I acted rightly, I should take that lowest degree in preference to all this authority and prosperity on earth. The reason of this is evident: countless worlds with all their goods are after all only natural and finite things, but the good that is possessed and enjoyed in heavenly glory is the infinite God Himself; the authority over millions of worlds might last a thousand millions of years, but it must come to an end some time or other, while the glory of heaven can never diminish, and must last forever.

What a  
great good  
must not  
then be a  
still higher  
and higher  
degree of  
that glory!

Now, my dear brethren, if the lowest degree of glory is so valuable, what shall we say of twenty, a hundred, a thousand, of millions of degrees of greater and greater glory in heaven, which any one as long as he lives may work for and attain by the grace of God? If, for instance, one piece of silver is worth a shilling, two pieces of the same kind are double that value, and ten of them are ten times as much, a hundred are a hundred times more valuable, a thousand a thousand times, a million a million times; in the same way I say that a single degree of heavenly glory is such a precious treasure that it should not be bartered for countless worlds and worldly joys, then the second degree of glory is twice as precious, the hundredth, thousandth degree of increase is a hundred, a thousand times greater in value, and is a good that will last forever, and so on, according to the increase. Who can then understand or grasp the immensity of that good which consists in the increase of merit on earth and of eternal glory in heaven?

The saints  
in heaven  
understand  
this.

St. Theresa, who saw in a vision a small ray of the glory of the blessed, was so captivated by it and filled with astonishment that she afterwards acknowledged that not only does

the glory of the saints surpass all our ideas of it, but also that there is such a difference of degree in that glory that she would purchase even the least increase of it by suffering all the torments of the world if necessary; and if she had to bear all the tortures of the martyrs till the last day for the sake of ascending but one step higher in heaven, she would bear them with gladness. And, my dear brethren, that is what we can gain so easily if we are in the state of grace, by a good thought, a sigh directed to God, by our daily labor, nay, by eating and drinking; every moment we can make our glory greater and greater. Oh, fools that we are, how little we esteem the great fortune that has fallen to our lot! If the blessed in heaven were capable of regret, they would be sorry for only one thing, and that is that they did not do more good, or suffer more while on earth, in order to gain more glory in heaven. If they could feel envy they would be jealous of us mortals, because we can still add constantly to our glory in heaven; and if they were permitted to interrupt their happiness they would readily return to earth in order to do more good and suffer more, so as to return to heaven laden with a richer cargo of merits. Father Barry, of our Society, writes of a pious lady who died after a long and painful illness; she appeared to him after death and told him that she was happy, but that she would without hesitation, if the chance were offered her, return to earth and suffer the same illness till the end of the world in order (mark this, my dear brethren) to merit as much additional glory as would correspond to what one might gain by the devout recital of one Hail Mary. O my God! to suffer so much for so little! Ah, but it is not a little thing that can increase the joys of heaven even in the least degree; it is not a little thing that lasts forever. That illness would have come to an end with this world; but the increase of glory would have lasted for all eternity.

Now, my dear brethren, the good God allows us to do what is not permitted the saints in heaven. Although the heavenly citizens are incessantly occupied in acts of the most ardent love of God, they shall never on that account ascend a finger's breadth higher in heaven for all eternity, because death has deprived them of all power of meriting. But we, as long as we are on the way to eternity, that is, while we are in this mortal life, have the power and opportunity by zeal in doing good, and by patiently bearing adversity, of adding every moment a new de-

We are at liberty always to add to our future glory: but most people neglect that.

gree to our future eternal reward. O priceless time of grace! that we blind mortals so often misspend in idleness, and sleep, and frivolity, although we might gain endless treasures by it! O deplorable state of sin! in which most men are for weeks, months, and years without doing penance, and meanwhile, since they have not sanctifying grace, they are not able, even by works that are in themselves most holy, to add the least iota to the goods of heaven! How careful, diligent, and thrifty we are when there is question of making a few shillings and increasing our temporal wealth! Should we not employ at least the same amount of energy in adding to our eternal glory in heaven? But in what does this increase of glory properly consist which distinguishes one saint from another? The answer to this we shall see briefly in the

### Second Part.

A higher degree of glory in heaven consists in a clearer vision of God.

For one to be truly happy in the possession of a great good he must have a true knowledge and appreciation of the good he owns, otherwise he will find as little pleasure in it as a child would in a costly diamond, with whose value it is utterly unacquainted. And the clearer that knowledge is, the greater is the joy, the happiness that comes from the good possessed. Herein consists chiefly and solely the difference of glory among the elect in heaven, namely, in the clearer vision and knowledge of God. Each and every one of the blessed, as we have said before, beholds the uncovered face of God and the full plenitude of the divine essence; they all see His omnipotence, wisdom, holiness, goodness, justice, beauty, eternity, as well as all His other infinite perfections; yet one sees this far more clearly and perfectly than another, according as the greater or less degree of his merits affords him a greater or less light. Just as on earth any eye, even that of an ignorant peasant, can see the firmament and remark its size and roundness, its stars and clouds; but the astronomer with his glass can have a far clearer and more extended view of it. Any mind can grasp a truth along with its fundamental reason, but a cultivated mind will see it far clearer than an ignorant and unlearned one. Thus, speaking with due proportion of the blessed in heaven, it is also with the beatific vision, according to the greater or less amount of light that accompanies it.

In a greater From this clearer vision and knowledge of God comes an-



other advantage: the blest soul who enjoys it is more like to <sup>likeness to</sup> God in beauty and knowledge. So great, my dear brethren, is the power of the Sovereign Good that it absorbs and, as it were, transforms into itself him who beholds it in glory. So speaks St. Paul: "But we all beholding the glory of the Lord with open face are transformed into the same image."<sup>1</sup> "We know," says St. John, "that when He shall appear we shall be like to Him: because we shall see Him as He is."<sup>2</sup> Now if that transformation and likeness to God takes place even in the least of the elect because he sees God, how much more perfect will it not be in one of the greater saints who see Him much clearer, and have His likeness more deeply impressed on them? And if even the least of the saints, illumined with even one degree of the light of glory, is made so beautiful by the mere vision of God that he far surpasses in splendor all created beauties, and shines seven times brighter than the sun, as St. Augustine says: "The lowest in the kingdom of heaven shall shine like the sun, which will then be seven times brighter than it now is,"<sup>3</sup> then: a hundred thousand times more brilliant must be the beauty of the soul that is a hundred thousand degrees higher in glory. Who can grasp the immensity of the brightness and beauty of the principal inhabitants of the kingdom of God, of the apostles, the martyrs, and especially of the great Queen of heaven, Mary? O mortal! who art sometimes so bewitched by a perishable beauty that thy whole heart is ensnared by it, ah, raise the eyes of thy mind to the beauties of heaven, and rejoice that thou art furnished with ways and means of attaining even to their utmost perfection, if thou only wilt!

Or perhaps thou art ambitious and strivest for a high place among men? Then again raise up thy eyes and thy honoring heart to the kingdom of heaven, and behold there the third advantage, the indescribable honor to which he shall be raised in the city of God, before the whole court of heaven, who by the greater amount of merit accumulated in this life has prepared for himself a higher degree of glory, and a place so much nearer to the throne of the divine majesty. "I will give to

<sup>3</sup> In a higher rank among the saints.

<sup>1</sup> Nos vero omnes, revelata facie gloriam Domini speculantes, in eandem imaginem transformamur.—II. Cor. iii. 18.

<sup>2</sup> Scimus, quoniam cum apparuerit, similes ei erimus; quoniam videbimus eum sicuti est.—I. John iii. 2.

<sup>3</sup> Ultimus in regno cœlorum, ut sol fulgebit, qui tunc septies clarior, quam nunc erit.—S. Aug. Tract. de cognit. veræ vitæ.

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them," such is the promise of the Lord by the Prophet Isaias, "in My house, and within My walls, a place and a name better than sons and daughters: I will give them an everlasting name which shall never perish. And the children of the stranger that adhere to the Lord, to worship Him, and to love His name, to be His servants, . . . I will bring them into My holy mount,"<sup>1</sup> and I will make them great in glory before the others. Oh, what an honor to have the preference for all eternity in the kingdom of God! Here on earth we see how the saints are honored in all Christendom by churches built to their memory, and splendid altars, and magnificent statues, and by all sorts of offerings, vows, prayers, and hymns; we see how princes and kings bend the knee before their relics and humbly beseech their intercession; but what must it be in heaven, where their dignity and holiness are far better understood and appreciated and more fervently loved? It is a great honor to be held in esteem by many men, by men of understanding and learning, and especially by great men; and the greater the number of those who show the honor, the more is the honor itself increased and prized. What then must be the exceeding great and unspeakable honor of the saint who is raised above others in heaven? for he is admired, prized, loved, praised, esteemed by a countless multitude of the wisest, noblest, most mighty of the elect of God; that is, by so many princes and chiefs of the heavenly kingdom, by so many millions of saints, amongst whom are popes, prelates, doctors, virgins, martyrs, confessors, religious, apostles, patriarchs, prophets, and moreover by so many millions of angels, archangels, thrones, dominations, cherubim and seraphim; by Mary, the Queen of angels, nay, by Jesus Christ Himself, the King of glory, and finally by the supreme majesty of the Most Holy and Divine Trinity. David, who saw but a small spark of it, was so rapt in admiration that he exclaimed: "To me Thy friends, O God! are made exceedingly honorable: their principality is exceedingly strengthened."<sup>2</sup> Ah, vain children of the world, why do you run so foolishly after a petty, empty honor that exists only in the false ideas of men? Why do you go to such trouble to beg for a worthless

<sup>1</sup> Dabo eis in domo mea et in muris meis locum, et nomen meum a filiis et filiabus; nomen sempiternum dabo eis, quod non peribit. Et filios advenæ, qui adherent Domino, ut colant eum, et diligant nomen ejus, ut sint ei in servos . . . adducam eos in montem sanctum meum. —Is. lvi. 5-7.

<sup>2</sup> Mihi nimis honorificati sunt amici tui, Deus; nimis confortatus est principatus eorum. —Ps. cxxxviii. 17.

title, a nod of the head, a rank that seems to place you a finger's breadth higher than others in the social scale? "O ye sons of men! . . . why do you love vanity and seek after lying?"<sup>1</sup> Do you really wish to gratify your ambition? Then you have a most glorious opportunity of so doing; it is in your power, by increasing your merits daily, hourly, and every moment, to raise yourselves higher and higher in true honor in heaven. But, alas! who thinks of this?

Finally, the difference of glory in heaven consists in the greater happiness one saint shall have above another in the eternal possession of God. For just as in hell, although all the damned lie in the same fire, yet their torments are different according to the debts they have incurred and sins committed, so the blessed in heaven shall share its joys and delights according to the measure of their merits, although they shall all see the same God. Of the blessed in general the prophet David says: "They shall be inebriated with the plenty of Thy house: and Thou shalt make them drink of the torrent of Thy pleasure;"<sup>2</sup> so that they shall swim as it were in an ocean of delights and pleasures. Now if there is such an inundation of joy in the vision and love of God, even in the case of those blessed souls who have brought only one degree of sanctifying grace, received in the sacrament of baptism, with them out of this life into eternity, how immense must not be the eternal joys of a saint who is higher in bliss, who kept on increasing sanctifying grace and thereby everlasting glory in heaven every hour, nay, every moment sometimes, for twenty, thirty, forty, fifty, sixty, seventy, eighty years, during which time he lived in the state of grace on earth?

O joys! O joys of heaven! O eternal joys of heaven! so it depends on myself then, if I only choose, to make you always greater and greater for myself? O my God! what thanks do I not owe Thee for having preserved me in life for so many years, and offered me so many graces that I might increase my great happiness in heaven! On one occasion a demon was exorcised, and while he was yet in the body of the possessed person was asked what he would do to arrive at the vision of God. His answer was that if he had a passible body, such as we have, and if God were to create a fiery pillar, beset all round with sharp swords and knives, and that pillar reached from the lowest

In greater  
joy.

So that we  
must be  
most grate-  
ful to God,  
who pre-  
serves us  
that we  
may earn  
more glory  
in heaven.

<sup>1</sup> *Fili hominum, utquid diligitis vanitatem et queritis mendacium?*—Ps. iv. 3.

<sup>2</sup> *Inebriabuntur ab ubertate domus tue, et torrente voluptatis tue potabis eos.*—Ibid.

depths of earth to the highest heavens, he would willingly climb up and down this pillar till the day of judgment, tearing his flesh to pieces, if he could only by so doing see God for one moment, although the next moment he should have to go back to hell again forever. My God, what am I to think of this! If the spirit of evil would think himself happy to have even a momentary glance at the divine countenance, and would be ready to purchase it at the cost of so much suffering, how fortunate am I not? for by using very easy means during my short life I can gain that heavenly vision, not merely for a moment, but for all eternity; nay, if I will, I can enhance its joy and glory and make it greater and greater forever! Should I not be willing to toil and labor incessantly for that object? But, O fool that I am, and forgetful of my own interests! hitherto my chief care and labor have been devoted to temporal things that cannot be of any use to me in eternity, while that infinite good has had but little place in my thoughts! Ah, how many beautiful opportunities I have lost of adding to my eternal glory in heaven! I could have added to it in that illness, in that painful affliction, in that great injustice that I suffered from. All my impatience, my murmurs and complaints against God, my curses and imprecations against those whom I imagined to be the causes of my misfortune, have made these crosses useless to me. I could have increased my glory by the practice of Christian charity and mercy towards the poor and needy, but my avarice and inordinate greed of gain hardened my heart to pity and kept my hand closed to generosity. I could have increased my glory by more frequently mortifying my senses and by voluntary penances, but my self-love hindered me from doing it. I could have increased my glory by more frequently receiving the holy sacraments, but my laziness and sloth stood in my way. I could have increased it by prayer, and often raising my mind to God, but my domestic occupations hardly allowed me to think of Him once during the day. I could have increased it even by my daily labor, and those occupations that I had to spend my time in every day according to the requirements of my state of life, but through want of a good supernatural intention all my labor and work have been fruitless, as far as gaining heaven is concerned. But in future I shall know how to look after my interests better; no minute of the precious time that still remains to me shall go by without merit, that I may always raise my throne in heaven higher and nearer to the throne

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of God, so that I may behold my God all the more clearly, love Him all the more perfectly, and rejoice in Him all the more. Amen.

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*FIFTY-THIRD SERMON.*

**ON THE EASY MEANS THAT WE MAY USE TO INCREASE OUR  
GLORY IN HEAVEN.**

**Subject.**

Wonderfully easy has God made it for us to increase sanctifying grace here and glory in heaven.—*Preached on the fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost.*

**Text.**

*Querite ergo primum regnum Dei.*—Matt. vi. 33.

“Seek ye therefore first the kingdom of God.”

**Introduction.**

Blind mortals on this world, who, weighed down by incessant cares during your lives, trouble yourselves only about what you shall have to eat and drink, and wherewith you shall be clothed, how you are to heap up wealth and riches, or to gain an honored place among men, or to secure your bodily comforts and gratify your senses! Blind mortals, I repeat; for how vain is your labor! It has nothing to do with what we are sent on earth to seek. Quite different is the end that God had in view when He created us. “Seek ye first the kingdom of God;” it is an eternal gratification of body and soul, an eternal garment of glory, an eternal treasury of riches, an eternal crown of honor, eternal joys and delights in the kingdom of God, that we should alone strive for with all our might; and this too we can if we are in the state of grace and wish to do so; this we can gain and increase, and in fact gain and increase with ease. Ah, where is our avarice, our ambition? where our desire for true joys if we take no care of this? “Seek ye first the kingdom of God.” My dear brethren, on last Sunday we have seen that we can always add to our heavenly honor, wealth, and happiness in the kingdom of God; and we have seen too what a great good even the least increase of the kind must be, and in what it consists.

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If we now consider how wonderfully easy God has made this increase of merits and consequently of eternal glory, we can easily conclude that He has a great desire to bring us to heaven and give us a high place there, and a great wish that we should strive incessantly for this high place; as we shall see in this instruction.

### Plan of Discourse.

*Wonderfully easy has God made the means of increasing sanctifying grace here, and eternal glory hereafter. Such is the whole subject. Let us then use them with unceasing zeal, and in all our actions seek first the kingdom of God.*

Such shall be the conclusion, with Thy grace, O dear Lord! which we beg of Thee through the Mother of grace and our holy guardian angels.

God does not require anything very great or extraordinary of us to gain heaven.

If the Almighty were to exact of us mortals great, extraordinary, and most difficult work and labor in order to gain His eternal heaven; if He were to say to each one of us: see, heaven is offered you, but if you wish to gain it you must cut yourself with knives over your whole body, tear yourself with hooks, burn yourself with glowing torches, cut off your limbs, allow yourself to be boiled in oil, and those torments you must endure for a thousand years without interruption or alleviation, for I will not give heaven to any one for a lower price: what would you think of that, my dear brethren? Would it not be a hard price to pay? Would you not shudder with horror at the thought of having to endure such torments? And yet would it be asking too much? Would the price be too high for the possession of an infinite Good? for the privilege of dwelling in the land of everlasting joys? For the sake of gaining an eternal heaven, says St. Augustine, it would be but right to undertake an eternal labor; and as we heard in the last sermon, the evil spirit offered to endure the most fearful torments till the last day if he might thereby enjoy the sight of God only for a moment. And several saints professed their willingness, if such were the will of God, to suffer the most painful illness till the end of the world, only to increase their glory in heaven by as much as could be gained by saying devoutly one Hail Mary.

But accepts our daily and even

But, O God of goodness! how little Thou really askest of us as the price of Thy eternal kingdom of heaven! What easy means

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Thou hast supplied us with to enable us daily, hourly, nay, every moment, to add to our eternal joys in Thy kingdom, if we only wish! God has, my dear brethren, so to speak, all sorts of clever inventions to make it easy for us to increase our glory. For in the first place He reckons as meritorious of sanctifying grace, and consequently of everlasting glory, each and every good work we do, not merely those that are very perfect, but even the ordinary, in themselves trivial and even seemingly useless works we perform, provided only we are in the state of grace and do those works for God's sake with a good intention. We are assured of this by the Council of Trent, which anathematizes expressly those who dare to teach the contrary. Now, although all good works are not equally meritorious, but one merits more than another according as it is in itself more perfect, or difficult, or performed with greater zeal, yet even the least works have their value and merit for eternal life. What can be easier or less difficult than to give a piece of bread to a hungry man, to give a drink of water to the thirsty, a rag of clothing to cover the naked, advice to the doubting, a word of consolation to the afflicted, or to visit the sick and imprisoned? Yet all this is reckoned as meritorious, and according to the measure of the merit gained will be rewarded with endless treasures in heaven for all eternity; and our Judge, Jesus Christ Himself, tells us that it is for such things that He will call the just to His kingdom on the last day. What is more commonplace, or more seemingly useless than eating, drinking, walking, standing, sitting, working? And yet if these things are done according to the requirements of our state of life, in the grace of God, and to His honor and glory, according to the exhortation of the Apostle they too will be considered meritorious of eternal glory.

Oh, dear Christians, what a good, generous Lord we serve! Who has ever seen or heard of such wonderful munificence, even in the mightiest monarch of earth! for what potentate is there who would reward with whole provinces or countries the least services rendered him by his subjects, such as, for instance, an inclination of the head, bending the knee, or offering an humble prayer? No, indeed! Great men know nothing of small things as far as rewarding them is concerned; and if they were to act otherwise their treasury would soon be empty. God alone is that great Lord who is as rich as He is generous, and He can and will reward with an immense, eternal recompense even the

*in themselves trivial acts as meritorious of glory.*

*How generous our God is!*

slightest things we do for Him, such as a genuflection, a sigh, pronouncing the name of Jesus, an aspiration during our work; nay, a mere good will and act of desire, although it is never carried into execution, will merit heaven. O Christians! I repeat, how good it is to serve such a rich and generous Lord!

God has so ordained that our good works cannot merit anything but grace and heavenly glory.

In the second place we can see how easy God has made it for us to increase our eternal glory from the fact that our good works, according to the present disposition of Providence, merit nothing but an increase of sanctifying grace and of glory hereafter; and this we must not forget, my dear brethren. Riches, honors, temporal prosperity, success in business, health, a long life, the conversion of a sinner, help and assistance in temptations and dangers of the soul, good inspirations of the Holy Ghost, constancy in the love of God, and that which is most important of all and on which everything depends, the grace of final perseverance and a happy death: these are the goods that the Lord can and will bestow on us, but they are not goods with which our good works shall be rewarded; we may humbly pray for them but we cannot merit them; they may be received as a free gift, but not claimed as a just recompense of merit. Why so? Are the good works we perform in the state of grace and which are united with the merits of Jesus Christ, not worth so much as to merit those goods? Truly, they are worth it and much more. But God has determined to give them no other reward than the increase of grace here and glory hereafter; this exhausts all their merit, so that we may be able to make our eternal joys always greater and greater.

And this merit we may not give away to any one.

Thirdly, this is the very object God has in view in making the merit of our good works altogether our own property, so that it cannot be transferred to others, living or dead. He thus, as it were, places us in the same condition as little children who are under the care of a guardian, and who are indeed owners of their property, but with such limited rights that they cannot make away with any of it lawfully. It is nearly the same with the merit of our good works. I can, for instance, by my prayers, fasting, alms-deeds, Masses, acts of mortification, etc., obtain some blessing from God for the soul or body of some other living person, but no matter how willing I may be to do so, I cannot give him the merit of these good works; it is out of my power to assign that over to another; it is and remains my own property. And if I say a Mass for the souls in purgatory; if I



give them, as many pious Christians do, all my good works, what do I do? I merely give away the satisfaction for the punishment due to sin, and by those very works that I thus give away I merit for myself the increase of sanctifying grace here and of eternal glory hereafter as my reward; this, although I might wish to give it away, or might imagine I have already given it, I cannot alienate from myself; it is a property, a fund that belongs to me alone as its lawful owner. "For," says the Apostle, "what things a man shall sow those also shall he reap,"<sup>1</sup> and no other can have any right or claim to that property. Oh, what a comfort for us, my dear brethren, if we only wish to do good works! How careful the good God is of our gain and eternal interests!

Fourthly, our good works continually increase in merit more and more according to the measure of the increase and augmentation of sanctifying grace. For example: a child who has just come to the full use of reason has only the grace it received in baptism,—one single degree, let us call it. Now this child says the Lord's prayer with devotion, and thereby merits a new degree of grace here and of glory hereafter, so that it actually possesses two degrees. If it again says the Lord's prayer, it adds still more to its grace here and glory hereafter than it gained by the first recital. Why? Because the second prayer is said in a state of greater sanctifying grace than the first, and thus it comes from a soul that is more pleasing to God. The third prayer is still more meritorious than the second and first, the fourth than the third, and so the merit of good works goes on increasing more and more till death, in proportion to the increase of grace. What a happiness this is for us Christians if we only earnestly wish to do good! What an immense accumulation of eternal joys can we not heap up even in the course of one year! Nay, how much may we not gain in one day if we are in the state of grace, and are united with God from morning till night by the good intention!

Fifthly, the good God is not satisfied with the mere merits that we can gain by our own work and labor, that is, by our own good works; for in the institution of the holy sacraments He has opened to us an inexhaustible living fountain of graces and merits that are given to our souls in the reception of those sacraments, immediately through the merits of Jesus Christ, or as

According to the degree of grace, merit increases, as well as the grace itself and heavenly glory.

Besides, our merit is increased immediately by the merits of Christ in the recep-

<sup>1</sup> Quæ enim seminaverit homo, hæc et metet.—Gal. vi. 8.

tion of the  
sacraments.

theologians say, "*ex opere operato*," and that are rewarded hereafter with eternal glory. Thus, for instance, if I am in the state of grace, and confess my sins again with true sorrow and contrition, and am again absolved from them, I merit a new degree of sanctifying grace and heavenly glory, not merely on account of my contrition and humble confession, but also through the virtue of the sacrament, which immediately through the merits of Christ, without any work of mine so far, confers new merit on me. Of all the other sacraments the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar has most power in this respect when one receives it worthily; partly because its proper effect is to increase sanctifying grace in the soul, partly because Jesus Christ, who comes to us, God and Man, as our Guest, for our good, acts on the occasion like a wealthy prince who, as be- seems his high personality, gives away not copper money, but gold and silver, and that too with the utmost liberality; and that we may all the more easily enjoy His generosity He has made this sacrament the easiest of all to be received, penance alone excepted. Baptism, Confirmation, Holy Orders can be received validly but once in a life-time, and Extreme Unction but once during the same dangerous illness; Matrimony can be received but once, except one of the married couple dies. But the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar and Penance can be repeated and received as often as we wish,—every month, every week, nay, frequently during the week. What else can be the object of such a beautiful invention of the divine generosity if not to entice us to receive that sacrament often, that we may thus drink more deeply at the living fountain of grace, enrich our souls more and more with merit, and make our future glory in heaven greater and greater?

Our merits  
cannot be  
lessened by  
venial sin.

Sixthly, what should be a source of great consolation for us, God has ordained that the merits which we have accumulated by our good works during life, or that have been granted us out of the treasure of Christ in the reception of the sacraments, can never be lessened in the least by any venial sin or imperfection or fault whatever. Mark this, my dear brethren. Venial sin is an offence against God and deserves temporal punishment, but it does not take away sanctifying grace either in part or altogether, even if our small sins surpassed in number the sands on the sea-shore. All the sanctifying grace that we have once collected and accumulated belongs to us always, as long as we do not make

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God our enemy by committing mortal sin; and hence it still preserves its right, according to its measure and degree, to the eternal joys of heaven. The accounts between God and us are not regulated as they are between men; in the latter case the receipt is compared with the expenditure, the debt with the payment; thus, for instance, I have lent you twenty shillings, and you owe me twenty shillings. On the other hand I have on a certain occasion received goods from you to the amount of ten shillings, so that that sum has to be deducted from your debt, and you owe me only ten. Again, you have in my name given six shillings to Peter; thus your debt is lessened again, and you owe me only four, and so on. This, I say, is not the way in which God reckons with us; He keeps two different books; in one He writes down the merit of our good works, for which He has bound Himself to give us heaven as a reward; in the other He writes down our daily faults and venial sins, as well as the mortal sins we have repented of, for which we deserve some punishment. Neither of these books has anything to do with the other. God does not say: you have done so many good works, and therefore I owe you such and such a reward in heaven; but you have often offended me by venial sin, and you have not yet satisfied for the mortal sins you have blotted out by repentance, so that I shall strike out some of your merit and only give you so much. No, my dear brethren, that is not the way; otherwise what on earth would become of us poor mortals? And how would we fare in the summing up of accounts, with the repeated sins and short-comings that we are guilty of day by day? How could our sanctifying grace ever increase if it were constantly lessened? and what sort of a reward could we expect in heaven? No; praised and blessed a thousand times be the loving arrangements of divine Providence! He assures to us forever the whole capital of grace and merit so that we can never lose any of it. In the book of thy debts, O man! (so will the Almighty reckon with us) I find so many thousand venial sins, and so many mortal sins that have been blotted out by repentance; for all these thou must pay me to the last farthing, either by satisfaction in this life, or by suffering in the next. In the book of My debts, on the other hand, I find so many thousand good works that thou didst perform in the state of grace; for all these I owe thee so many degrees of eternal glory; and these thou shalt receive without the least diminution in the king-

dom of heaven if thou diest in My friendship. Mark, my dear brethren, what a consolation this should be for us. If I have to spend a thousand years, and even several thousand, if the world lasts so long, in purgatory, and to burn there till the end of the world on account of my sins and to pay my debts, I am still certain and assured that my glory in heaven is kept for me quite intact, and that I shall receive it without the least diminution according to what I have merited by my good works on earth. Oh, I repeat, what a consolation!

Merit  
mortified by  
mortal sin  
revives af-  
ter repent-  
ance.

Mortal sin is the only thing that robs us altogether of all our treasure of grace and merit. Ah, Christians! beware of it! But even here the goodness and generosity of God have found another clever means of promoting our interests. How so? In this way; when a man consents to mortal sin, the book in which his merits are written out is as it were thrown down under the desk and forgotten; the Lord God looks on that man now as an enemy, and if he dies in that state he cannot expect the least reward for all his merits throughout eternity; he is just as badly off as if he had never done a good act in his life. But when he makes a good confession or an act of perfect contrition, and thus recovers the grace and friendship of God, the book of his merits is again taken up; it still contains the record of all he gained before falling into sin, and he receives it all back again in addition to the new merit he has gained by his perfect contrition or repentance; and his subsequent good works are as meritorious as the grace he had before his fall would have made them; nay, on account of the increase of grace gained by repentance, those works are more meritorious than any similar works he did before. We cannot speak in the same way of sin; for when it is once forgiven it does not revive again, nor is it again imputed to the sinner who relapses into grievous guilt; because God's generosity surpasses His severity, and He seeks our greater glory, but not our greater punishment. Oh, what a comfort for those who have often sinned grievously, and have truly repented and made a good confession! O good God! be Thou again blessed for Thy fatherly providence! How loving Thou art to us! How anxious Thou art to further our welfare and eternal interests!

God pro-  
longs our  
lives that  
we may in-

Seventhly, the desire that God has to exalt us in heaven is evident from the lengthening of our lives. One man He keeps alive for twenty, another for thirty, a third for forty, fifty, sixty, seventy, eighty, ninety years; and what is the reason of that?

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If He merely wished us to gain heaven as a reward, would not a short time suffice? As I have told you before, I may, if I am in the state of grace, gain everlasting happiness by a single fervent sigh, by one act of charity. And the little infant who dies immediately after having received baptism has an assured claim to heaven. So it is; an hour, a quarter of an hour, nay, a minute is more than enough for any one to gain heaven. Why then does God prolong our lives for such a lengthened period? Oh, my dear brethren, here again we have another invention of the divine goodness in our regard! God is not satisfied with merely having us in heaven; He wishes us to mount higher and higher, in order to enjoy ourselves all the more with Himself forever; we must become like to the angels in glory, nay, if we wish, we may ascend even higher than the angels; therefore He keeps us so long in life in order that by continually doing good works we may all those years constantly add to our eternal treasures every day, hour, moment even, of our existence.

And hence too a long life is one of the greatest blessings that God bestows on us, and one that He has promised specially to those who honor their parents; but it is a blessing withheld from the wicked on account of their sins, for the Lord has threatened to shorten their lives as no slight chastisement of their misdeeds. Mark this well, you cowardly, pusillanimous souls, who often sigh: ah, would that I had been so happy as to have died in my infancy; now I should be with God in heaven! Truly, you would be in heaven; but, nevertheless, thank the divine goodness for having spared your lives so long; for if you earnestly wish it you can and will ascend a hundred times, a hundred million times higher in heaven than you would be if you had had your wish. Every morning, as one of the elect who appeared to St. Mechtildis said to her, raise your hands to God and thank Him heartily for having granted you another day, every moment of which you can turn into a fruitful field of merits for eternal life. Let those also take notice of this who wilfully shorten the precious treasure of life, and contrary to the original intention of the Almighty precipitate themselves into a premature grave by intemperance, by unbridled anger, impurity, and wantonness. And finally, let all Christians see what an immense loss they cause themselves to suffer by wantonly wasting the time of their lives in habitual gambling, idleness, useless amusements, sleeping too long in the morning and omitting the good intention; thus they

crease our merit.

What a great benefit that is!

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become grey in years, and at last enter into eternity as poor in merits as the little infant.

God is always urging us to add to our merit.

Finally, while thus preserving our lives, how does not the good God keep constantly urging us to increase our merit and glory by diligently performing good works? The salutary inspirations with which He speaks to our hearts and moves us to do that work of devotion, to undertake that act of penance and mortification, to bestow that alms on the poor, and do other works of charity, to visit that church, to hear the word of God, to assist at holy Mass, and so forth: what else are they but loving invitations to increase our glory in heaven by those holy actions? That misfortune, sickness, poverty, death, trouble, and adversity: what else is it but a check to keep us from vice, a spur to urge us on to the fulfilment of the divine will, to humility, to penance, to prayer, and other virtuous and meritorious works? And as a matter of fact a single "My God, Thy will be done" in the time of trial brings in more merit than a thousand prayers in the time of prosperity. The very temptations that we suffer from the devil, by which that evil spirit seeks our ruin, are permitted by God, and ordained by Him, as the Apostle says, for our greater good and profit: "God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that which you are able, but will make also with temptation issue, that you may be able to bear it."<sup>1</sup> He allows us to be tempted in order to purify our virtue, to prove our love and fidelity towards Him, and to earn for ourselves a crown greater in proportion to the trouble we have in bravely overcoming our enemy. And besides all this, how earnestly He exhorts us to do good! In the Gospel of St. Matthew He tells us not to be careful about the transitory things of earth, but to devote our whole attention to the eternal riches of heaven: "Lay not up to yourselves treasures on earth: where the rust and moth consume, and where thieves break through and steal. But lay up to yourselves treasures in heaven: where neither the rust nor moth doth consume, and where thieves do not break through nor steal."<sup>2</sup> In St. Luke we read that we must not allow the talents and gifts of nature and grace that have been entrusted to us to lie idle, but rather

<sup>1</sup> *Fidelis Deus est, qui non patietur vos tentari supra id quod potestis sustinere.*—I. Cor. x. 13.

<sup>2</sup> *Nolite thesaurizare vobis thesauros in terra: ubi aerugo et tinea demolitur, et ubi fures effodiunt et furantur. Thesaurizate autem vobis thesauros in coelo: ubi neque tinea demolitur, et ubi fures non effodiunt, nec furantur.*—Matt. vi. 19, 20,

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make an advantageous use of them until the time of His coming: "Trade till I come."<sup>1</sup> By the wise Ecclesiasticus He tells us not to lose the smallest iota of precious time, but to spend it all in meritorious works: "Defraud not thyself of the good day, and let not the part of a good gift overpass thee."<sup>2</sup> For that reason He has forbidden all idle words, and commanded us by the Apostle not to eat or drink or do anything except for the honor and glory of God: "Whether you eat or drink, or whatsoever else you do, do all to the glory of God,"<sup>3</sup> so that during the whole day nothing may pass by without merit and an increase of heavenly glory. Therefore He condemns to eternal darkness the lazy servants who allow their talents to lie unused; and He casts into the fire the barren tree, although it may be green and covered with leaves.

My dear brethren, could God have done more either to make the increase of glory easier for us, or to prove His own great eagerness to see us amassing immense treasures for heaven? Admire, praise, bless, and thank His infinite goodness in occupying Himself so much for our welfare and greater interests. But at the same time wonder at and deplore the blindness and laziness of most Christians, who live as careless of that great good as if they knew or valued not their own eternal happiness. And how many there are who, buried in temporal cares, do not cast a thought on heaven once during the day! How many who have such low and grovelling minds that they say in the words quoted by Gerson: I do not want the merits of the apostles; I do not desire the highest place in heaven; if I can be happy with the lowest there I shall be content!

Christians, away with such thoughts! Far higher should our holy ambition ascend! Much more exalted should our desires be! If God had given to us mortals the choice of a state of life when we come to the use of reason, who would content himself with the condition of a poor peasant when he could have that of a rich lord, or prince, or king? Now the freedom that is not allowed us in this miserable world God has reserved for us in heaven, where the highest position of immortal glory may be ours if we choose. There we can, if we wish, be princes, kings, monarchs in glory and happiness; nay, the Almighty invites us to

So much does God wish us to add to our glory in heaven, and we think so little of it.

Exhortation always to strive for more glory in heaven.

<sup>1</sup> *Negotiamini dum venio.*—Luke xix. 13.

<sup>2</sup> *Non defrauderis a die bono, et particula boni doni non te prætereat.*—Ecclesi. xiv. 14.

<sup>3</sup> *Sive manducatis, sive bibitis, sive aliud quid facitis: omnia in gloriam Dei facite.*—I. Cor. x. 31.

choose a high place; He urges and drives us thereto; and shall we, through sheer laziness, refuse to accept what He offers us? Truly, O good God! with the help of Thy grace I will in future endeavor with all earnestness to reach the place in heaven that Thou hast prepared for me. I am sorry for the beautiful time of my past life that I have so uselessly squandered without merit, for the many opportunities of gaining glory that I have neglected, for the many grievous sins by which I have completely forfeited all claim to heaven. I will now begin to repair these losses with greater zeal, redouble my daily good works, have a pure intention in all my actions, and labor till the end of my life, as far as I can, to ascend higher in heaven, that, O great Lord! since such is Thy wish, my greater joy and glory may also increase Thy honor and glory for all eternity. Amen.

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#### FIFTY-FOURTH SERMON.

##### ON THE FREQUENT RECOLLECTION OF AND MEDITATION ON HEAVEN.

###### Subject.

We should often think of heaven and desire it. First, because it is only right to do so; secondly, because we are forced to do so if we desire to gain heaven.—*Preached on the feast of the dedication of a church.*

###### Text.

*Vidi sanctam civitatem Jerusalem novam, descendentem de cœlo a Deo.*—Apoc. xxi. 2.

“I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God.”

###### Introduction.

Not without reason is this lesson about the heavenly city of Jerusalem read on the feast of the dedication of a church, for as the yearly recurrence of the feast reminds us of the benefits we have received during the year in the churches that we may return due thanks to God for them, so also whenever we appear in the churches, we should remember the heavenly Jerusalem, of which the sacred edifice is a symbol, and the eternal joys that



are there prepared for us, in order to meditate on them, to inflame our desires for them, and to encourage ourselves to serve God zealously. And, my dear brethren, this is but right; for heaven truly deserves our frequent consideration, our unceasing desires. Nay, this is even necessary for us if we really desire to enter heaven, as I now proceed to show.

#### Plan of Discourse.

*We should often think of heaven and desire it; it is only right that we should do so. This I shall prove in the first part. We are forced to do so if we wish to enter heaven; as I shall prove in the second part.*

Heavenly Father, we sigh and pray to Thee in the words of Thy holy Catholic Church, "that Thou wouldst raise up our minds to heavenly desires." We beseech Thee to hear us through the intercession of Mary, the Queen of heaven, and the princes of heaven, our holy guardian angels.

Everything has a natural inclination and tendency to the place to which it belongs and for which nature has intended it. Wild beasts always seek their caves and deserts; the birds frequent the lofty regions of the air, and although they may be comfortable and well-fed in a cage, they have neither rest nor peace until they find some opening by which they may escape and fly into the air again. Fish cannot live except in the water. A stone falls with the utmost velocity towards its centre on the earth. Fire always seeks its centre on high; if you try to confine it, it will force a passage for itself with violence, and overthrow the loftiest tower, as we know by experience to be the case when powder is exploded. The rivers flow back to their origin in the sea. And if all these creatures had reason, they would think and desire nothing but the end proposed for them; nor would they find rest or peace until they have actually reached the place intended for them by nature. Almost all men like to live in their native land, where they are well off; and if one has sometimes to seek a foreign shore, he often thinks and speaks of the town in which he was born, and eagerly listens to what others have to tell him of it. The whole year long students are looking forward to the holidays, when they can again go back to their father's house. What sailor does not long for the harbor when his ship is tossed about by the waves? What traveller does not wish to return to

Everything has a natural tendency towards the place to which it belongs.

the place from which he set out? Every step he takes, every movement of his body, is directed to the sole end of returning home.

Our end and  
home is  
heaven.

My dear brethren, what is the end and object for which we are created? It is a well-known question, one that can never be either sufficiently proposed or answered: why are we in this world? We are here to serve God during this life, to keep His commandments, and after this life to rejoice with God forever in the kingdom of heaven. Such is the answer to that question. Heaven is the place to which we really belong; it is our centre outside of which we cannot find rest; heaven is the eternal home towards which we must daily travel in this life, as on a pilgrimage, and we travel here as strangers and pilgrims. Heaven is the harbor to which we are making our way over the stormy, dangerous ocean of the world; heaven is the home of our Father to whom we pray daily: "Our Father, who art in heaven."

So that we  
should al-  
ways long  
for it.

What then should we do with our thoughts and desires if we do not often fix them on heaven? Why do we not look with joy on this our greatest inheritance, our happiest home? Why should we not pray hourly with the utmost fervor: "Father, Thy kingdom come"? Is it not surprising that we should desire anything else but this fatherland of ours? that we do not direct all our thoughts and desires thither the whole day? For daily and hourly we experience that we have not here a lasting dwelling, that this is not the place to which we belong, that in this sorrowful vale of tears we are beset on all sides with miseries and troubles, so that we have good reason for looking on the earth with disgust, and for longing and sighing all the more eagerly for the place of joys, the haven of eternal rest? And that is the chief reason why the God of infinite goodness, who loves us, His adopted children, far more tenderly than any father loves his offspring—that is the reason why He fills our lives with so many trials and miseries; He wishes to compel us, as it were, to desire the end of all this wretchedness and the glorious future that awaits us in His kingdom. Therefore He says to us daily in the holy Mass: "Lift up your hearts." Therefore He caused His apostle St. Paul to warn us so emphatically to "seek the things that are above, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God."<sup>1</sup> Why should your desires grovel on this earth? This is not the

<sup>1</sup> Quæ sursum sunt querite, ubi Christus est in dextera Dei sedens.—Coloss. iii. 1.

place of your rest: "Mind the things that are above, not the things that are upon the earth."<sup>1</sup>

Oh, if we had a true and lively faith in the greatness of the goods and joys that await us in heaven, we should not need such exhortations, but should feel drawn thither of ourselves. In olden times, as Julius Cæsar writes, the Swiss, hearing that Gaul was a fruitful country, had such a great desire to get possession of it that they not only left their homes, but even burnt them to ashes, so that having no hope of returning, they might be compelled to live in the beautiful land they were so anxious to get hold of. "Glorious things are said of thee, O city of God!"<sup>2</sup> What wonderful things we have already heard of thee! And what a superabundance of goods and pleasures faith tells us we shall find in thee, and that too forever! Shouldst thou not then form the object of our most eager desires? And yet we long so little for thee, we think of thee so seldom!

Christians! must it not be a just cause of indignation to the Almighty to see that we have such little desire, that we think so rarely of the eternal reward that He has prepared for us? Sometimes a father says in play to his child: to-morrow you shall come with me to hunt the hare; and the child's only wish is that the morning should come; he dreams of the promised pleasure; there is no fear of his forgetting it; and early in the morning he is awake and up to remind his father of his promise. And our heavenly Father has pledged His own infallible, divine word, that if we only love Him, in a short time we shall enter into His kingdom, and be and live forever with Him in all imaginable joys of body and soul. Now, if we rarely rejoice at the thought of this promise, feel but little desire for its fulfilment, and seldom think of it, that is a clear sign that we either do not quite believe in the divine promise, or else that we care but little for the heavenly goods that await us. In either case the Almighty has just cause for indignation; especially since He has built the palace of heaven more on our account than on His own. God was not in need of heaven; He was as happy during a long eternity before heaven was as He is now; He has created it for His dear creatures that they may have a dwelling-place in which they can share in His infinite happiness. Therefore I say again: since He means so well with us, it must annoy Him to

In heaven  
infinite  
goods and  
joys are  
prepared  
for us.

So that God  
may well  
be indig-  
nant with  
us for think-  
ing so lit-  
tle of it.

<sup>1</sup> *Quæ sursum sunt sapite, non quæ super terram.*—Coloss. iii. 2.

<sup>2</sup> *Gloriosa dicta sunt de te, civitas Dei.*—Ps. lxxvi. 3.

How He  
punishes  
that care-  
lessness.

see that we have so little desire for or thought of this heaven.

And that is what He complains of so bitterly by the Psalmist: "They set at naught the desirable land."<sup>1</sup> The ungrateful Jewish people had often and grievously sinned against God, but He patiently overlooked their vices and acted as if He did not see them; there was one thing, however, that He could not bear, and that was when on the journey to the promised land they thought of and sighed for the onions and garlic of Egypt, and valued them more highly than the heavenly manna that was rained down on them in the desert; on that account He punished several thousand of them with death. Much greater will His indignation be if He sees that we have little desire for the true and eternal happiness of heaven and its infinite delights, and that our thoughts and desires are sunk in the onions and garlic of this world. St. Gregory, the Venerable Bede, Cardinal Ballarmino, and others are of the unanimous opinion that in purgatory there is a special place where there is nothing else to suffer but an insatiable, intolerable, painful longing to see the face of God; and that is the place of punishment for those souls who during life had not a sufficient recollection of and desire for eternal happiness, although they owe no other satisfaction to the divine justice. Father Eusebius Nierenberg writes of Father John Ferdinandus, of our Society, that when he was professing theology in Rome, and was speaking of the mystery of the Blessed Trinity on which he had often and deeply pondered, he was inflamed with a most vehement desire to behold the supreme Godhead; whereupon he was ravished in spirit, and after many wonderful things had been shown to him, he was brought into a beautiful garden where he saw a soul adorned in the most splendid manner; the soul told him that he was one of our brethren who had spent seven years in the Society, but on account of his little desire for heaven and the beatific vision he had to suffer in that part of purgatory from a constantly increasing and constantly disappointed desire.

Much more  
angry will  
He be with  
those who  
despise  
heaven,  
and there  
are many  
such.

Now if this purgatory awaits those friends of God whose only fault was that their desire for heaven was not eager enough, what shall become of those who hardly ever think of heaven? of those who never deign to raise up their hearts and minds thither? of those who actually despise heaven, and look on all that is said of it as a fanciful invention? And finally, what is to become of

<sup>1</sup> Pro nihilo habuerunt terram desiderabilem.—Ps. cv. 24.

those who would willingly renounce all the riches and delights of a happy eternity if they could only live forever here below; nay, what is still more astonishing, who would barter heaven for the sake of enjoying themselves during this life, short as they know it to be? Like the man of whom Father Drexelius writes: he had been drinking in a tavern and began to blaspheme in his cups; if, he said, God allowed me to enjoy my wealth and to have my own way for a thousand years, I would let Him keep His heaven; and then he began to sing: "The heaven of heaven is the Lord's, but the earth He has given to the children of men."<sup>1</sup> The wretched Martin Luther in his Table Talk has vomited forth similar blasphemies; a thousand years of a joyful life would be worth any amount of heaven to him. Elizabeth, one of the most cruel persecutors of the Catholics in England, used to say: let me only reign for forty years and I will not trouble about heaven. God granted her a longer time than that; she reigned for forty-four years, and then lost both life and kingdom. But for a long time after many people saw on the river a most doleful apparition that kept on crying out: wo! wo! alas! I have reigned for forty years, and now must suffer in hell forever! Would to God that there were none to be found among Catholic Christians who are of the same opinion as those people, and who would willingly give up all claim to heavenly glory if they had not eternal flames to fear! "They set at naught the desirable land;" that blessed land, the inheritance of the children of God, the reward of our labor and trouble, the beautiful heaven that others so long for and sigh after, and for which they shed so many hot tears; that they set at naught; that they have no desire for, and hardly think of it once in the day.

And what on earth is the reason of this? Why is it that we so seldom think of heaven, and have so little desire for it, although the way thither is open to our thoughts and desires at any and every moment? Because, my dear brethren, either our hearts are too much attached to the things of this world and its pleasures, or else we forget ourselves and allow ourselves to be driven almost to desperation by the miseries of this life. Thus there are, generally speaking, two classes of men who make no account of the joys of heaven. The first comprises those who allow their minds and hearts to be completely captivated by temporal happiness, so that they have no thought of heaven; the

This want of desire for heaven comes from love of the world, and despair in trials.

<sup>1</sup> *Caelum cœli Domino: terram autem dedit filiis hominum.*—Ps. cxlvi. 16.

second consists of those whom misfortunes have driven to despair. Both classes are to be pitied and bewailed. But for that very reason, and that none of us may belong to either class, I say now that it is not only right but most necessary often to think of heaven and to raise our desires thither, as I shall now show in the

### Second Part.

Most men value temporal things too highly; hence they care little for heaven.

He whose weight drags him downwards requires a support to be able to keep upright. The afflicted man who cannot help himself is in need of consolation to encourage him not to give way to despair or to become too down-hearted in his trouble. This twofold help we must seek, and we shall find it in the frequent recollection of the promised joys of heaven. For in the first place, how comes it that we make so much of the goods, honors, and pleasures of the world, and snap at them greedily, like a hungry beast at its food? Is it not because we attend only to what we see before us with our bodily eyes, what we feel and know by experience to be pleasing and agreeable to the senses? Because nothing better or more agreeable than those worldly goods and pleasures presents itself to us, we set our whole and only happiness in them, and imagine we are wonderfully well off if we can have a share of them. In this respect we are like children who, when they get some butter and milk, or bread and honey, think they are in heaven and imagine there is nothing better to be had in the whole world, because they have never tasted anything better, and know nothing of more delicate or savory food. If sometimes a thought of heaven occurs to us, oh, it hardly lasts a moment, and it is so dim and cloudy that it makes no impression, leaves no desire in the heart, and so is unable to master the idea we have of the goods and joys of this world.

The devil represents to them temporal goods as greater than heavenly. Explained by a simile.

Besides, the devil, who cannot bear to see us lifting up our minds to the serious meditation of heavenly things, paints in our imaginations the pleasures and riches of this life in such lively and agreeable colors, and the joys of heaven on the other hand as so uncertain and trivial, that we have no taste for the latter, and fix our affections exclusively on the former. There are geographers who can describe the whole earth and its different countries on maps and globes. There are also astronomers who can map out the courses of the heavenly bodies and the whole firmament on a wooden or metal plate. Now suppose some

ignorant peasant were to ask the geographer to bring him round the earth and show him the different countries on the map; the geographer shows him a large map, and points with his finger to Asia, America, Africa, Europe; then he brings out map after map and shows him the different seas, rivers, provinces, kingdoms, and principalities of the whole world. Wonderful! exclaims the peasant; I had no idea the world was so big. He then goes to the astronomer to learn something of the heavens; the astronomer turns round the celestial globe, and shows him all sorts of circles and straight and curved lines; there, he says, in that lowest circle is the moon's orbit; in the next one this planet; in this the sun has its orbit; above these orbits comes the firmament, where the fixed stars are, and so he goes on describing the whole heavens in detail. The peasant stares open-mouthed. But, he asks, what is that in the middle of the globe? pointing to a small sphere no larger than a hazelnut. That, answers the other, is the earth, the world in which we live. But, my dear sir, replies the peasant, I have just come from a geographer who has shown me on his maps that the world is a huge globe, and now you wish to persuade me that it is only the size of a nut? Which am I to believe? Suppose now that some one overhears this, and whispers in his ear: do not be surprised at what you hear; the first man you went to was a geographer; this one is an astronomer; they have different branches of science to deal with; the former showed you only the earth and nothing more; this one shows you the heavens and the earth at the same time. He who considers the earth alone looks on it as wonderfully great and of vast extent, but he who contemplates the courses of the heavenly bodies and sees the earth at the same time will soon be aware that the latter is only a small affair in comparison with the heavens.

My dear brethren, the devil is a most skilful geographer, who well knows how to depict everything that belongs to the earth as most beautiful, glorious, and great. He did not hesitate to show his map even to our divine Lord, with the intention of thereby leading Him to indulge in greed of earthly goods; he led Him to the top of a high mountain, "and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them, and said to Him: All these will I give Thee if falling down Thou wilt adore me."<sup>1</sup> So he acts daily with us mortals; see, he says to our im-

So does the  
devil de-  
ceive us.

<sup>1</sup> Et ostendit ei omnia regna mundi et gloriam eorum, et dixit ei: hæc omnia tibi dabo, si cadens adoraveris me.—Matt. iv. 8, 9.

agination, what a beautiful thing to be held high in honor and the esteem of the world! What a fine thing to possess much money and property, to live in abundance, to wear magnificent clothing! What a paradise it is to enjoy one's self, to indulge in sensual pleasures! All these things he describes most cleverly. Now if we believe him; if we consider only the goods he proposes to us, then indeed we shall form a very high opinion of them, and since most people fix all their thoughts and attention on them, their hearts and desires are completely buried in them, so highly do they value such things.

It is therefore necessary for us often to think of heaven.

But after all the devil is only a deceiver, a lying geographer. Let us see what the astronomer has to say; then will the earth appear to us miserably small and mean. Let us take counsel of our faith, and ponder deeply on what it tells us of heavenly goods; let us often fix our thoughts on heaven, raise our eyes thither, and say to ourselves: behold the firmament; see how great and magnificent are the very lowest parts of the city of God; what must then be the glory of the divine palace itself? All that I can desire, hope for, wish for, possess, enjoy on earth is but transitory; it lasts only a short time; it is uncertain whether I shall ever have what I wish to have, and if I get it, it is equally uncertain whether I shall be master of it for one hour. There in heaven a boundless ocean of wealth, honors, and pleasures awaits me, and they will never come to an end; there I shall be safe from all evil and fear forever; there I shall enjoy for eternity whatever can delight my soul and my body with its five senses, and I shall enjoy myself to complete satiety; there I shall possess the God of infinite majesty and beauty as my own property and inheritance, and according to my own good will and pleasure for all eternity. True, I have not yet seen all this, but I am more certain of it by my faith than if my eyes had beheld it; I have the infallible written word of God for it that all these heavenly goods shall be mine if I serve Him truly for a short time during this life. What then would it profit me to gain the whole world with all its goods, honors, and pleasures if I had to suffer the loss of an eternal heaven?

Then shall our hearts be drawn from the world, and fixed on

O Christians! if we often recall this thought to our minds with a lively faith, how far different would be our judgment of earthly things! We should cry out with Saint Ignatius: "How vile the earth seems when I look up to heaven!" Nothing would be so dear or valuable to us that we would not willingly



sacrifice it to purchase this beautiful heaven, as the Eastern emperor Michael really did. He, as Baronius writes, was asked by the Patriarch through an ambassador to abdicate his crown. If I do so, said the emperor, what will the Patriarch give me for it? Heaven, was the answer. And without a moment's delay he laid down sceptre and crown, and retired into solitude. If we often meditate on the joys of heaven we should have the greatest pleasure in reading and hearing of the eager desires that the saints, ravished out of themselves, as it were, used to send forth to heaven; we would unite our sighs with theirs, sometimes exclaiming with David: "As the hart panteth after the fountains of waters, so my soul panteth after Thee, O God!" When shall that wished-for time arrive? "When shall I come and appear before the face of God?"<sup>1</sup> And again with St. Paul: "Having a desire to be dissolved and to be with Christ."<sup>2</sup> And with St. Augustine: "O heavenly country! land of safety! we see thee afar off; we sigh to thee from this vale of tears, and with our tears do we strive if happily we may come to thee. O glorious and desirable day! O day of joy that shall know neither night nor end! on which I shall hear the words: Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord! Enter into eternal joy, into the house of the Lord thy God," where all good things shall be, and no evil shall be found; where there shall be true life, a sweet and most pleasant life, a most joyous, eternal life! Ah, I faint for very love of thee, and my desire exhausts my strength! See how necessary it is for us often to think of heaven that our hearts and affections may not remain attached to this earth.

With regard now to the other class of men who are already against their will excluded from a share in the happiness of this world, and are overwhelmed with trials and crosses, the recollection of heaven is almost the only means by which they can keep themselves right. For where else can they find consolation? On earth there is none. What better then can they do than often to meditate on the everlasting joys of heaven which await them as a reward for what they suffer here? This is the only medicine against all the ills of life, and Christ Himself prescribes it to all the afflicted. The apostles hardly ever experienced more sorrow or affliction than when Christ, their beloved Master, left them as poor orphans abandoned to wolves, yet Our

heaven, as was the case with other servants of God.

The thought of heaven is also necessary for the afflicted, that they may learn patience.

<sup>1</sup> Quemadmodum desiderat cervus ad fontes aquarum, ita desiderat anima mea ad te Deus. Quando veniam et apparebo ante faciem Dei?—Ps. xli. 2, 3.

<sup>2</sup> Desiderium habens dissolvi et esse cum Christo.—Philipp. i. 23.

Lord easily consoled them, and in no other way than by simply reminding them of the future glory of heaven: "So also you now indeed have sorrow, but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice; and your joy no man shall take from you."<sup>1</sup> Be satisfied, My dear disciples! It is true we are to be separated from one another; but after a few days of sorrow we shall be united again, and that forever in the kingdom where there is no sorrow; then your hearts shall be filled with joy; you shall be fully satisfied and no trouble shall ever come near you! Nay, on that very account He calls them blessed when they are tried here below in various ways: "Blessed are ye when they shall revile you and persecute you, and speak all that is evil against you." Blessed are you when you have to suffer poverty, hunger, and thirst, ay, when you have to weep and mourn: "Be glad and rejoice, for your reward is very great in heaven."<sup>2</sup> If you only remember this all your trials will be sweetened.

The saints  
used this  
means.  
Shown from  
the Old  
Testament.

Before the time of Our Lord the same recollection lightened the burden of poverty for the elder Tobias. Be comforted, he said; "Fear not, my son: we lead indeed a poor life, but we shall have many good things" hereafter in heaven, if only here in our poverty "we fear God, and depart from all sin, and do that which is good."<sup>3</sup> Was there ever a man in the world who had such pain and affliction to endure as Job on the dung-hill? All possible misfortunes seem to have conspired against him; the devil put forth every effort to crush him, but all he said was: "Blessed be the name of the Lord."<sup>4</sup> The mere hope and remembrance of the vision of God that awaited him was the medicine that gave him that wonderful courage and constancy. "In my flesh I shall see my God."<sup>5</sup> Hardly can one refrain from shedding tears when reading the history of the heroic mother of the Machabees, consoling and encouraging her seven sons in their painful martyrdom. "I beseech thee, my son," said she to the youngest, who was the only one now left her, "look upon heaven; . . . so thou shalt not fear this tormentor."

<sup>1</sup> Nunc quidem tristitiam habetis, iterum autem videbo vos, et gaudebit cor vestrum; et gaudium vestrum nemo tollet a vobis.—John xvi. 22.

<sup>2</sup> Beati estis cum maledixerint vobis, et persecuti vos fuerint, et dixerint omne malum adversum vos; gaudete et exultate, quoniam merces vestra copiosa est in coelis.—Matt. v. 11, 12.

<sup>3</sup> Noli timere, fili mi; pauperem quidem vitam gerimus, sed multa bona habebimus, si timuerimus Deum, et recesserimus ab omni peccato, et fecerimus bene.—Tob. iv. 23.

<sup>4</sup> Sit nomen Domini benedictum.—Job i. 21.

<sup>5</sup> In carne mea videbo Deum meum.—Ibid. xix. 26.

The wicked king promises you worldly goods if you transgress the law; but be not deceived; "look upon heaven;" there you will possess goods of far greater worth. He threatens you with rods and scourges; the frying-pan is ready to roast you alive like your brothers; "look upon heaven," my child. Your tongue will be torn out, but fear not, as long as your eyes are left you, "look upon heaven;" it is worth all the torments you can suffer. The skin will be torn from your head, your hands and feet will be cut off, and thus maimed you will be slowly roasted to death; but have courage; "look upon heaven;" your pains will not last long, and in heaven we shall meet again. Thus this pious mother comforted her children in their terrible torments, and looked on with joyful heart while her own flesh and blood was thus cruelly mangled and cut to pieces. "Who beheld her seven sons slain in the space of one day, and bore it with a good courage for the hope that she had in God,"<sup>1</sup> until she in turn died a martyr's death.

The martyrs of the New Testament furnish me with countless examples of a similar constancy resulting from the consideration of heaven; I shall content myself with adducing one which St. Celsus, still a little boy, left for the admiration of posterity. He was born of a very noble family, and was brought up by his father Martianus, a most obstinate pagan and fierce persecutor of the Christians, and his mother, Marianilla, who was also a bigoted heathen; they reared him up to the worship of idols, so that he should inherit not only their riches, but also their impiety. But things turned out quite differently. While still a boy he was determined to become a Christian, and made open profession of the faith before his cruel father, remaining constant to it during the most terrible torments which ended his heroic childhood and his life together. Neither the threats of his father nor the caresses and tears of his mother, beset as he was by both, could turn him away from Christ. He was cast into a caldron of boiling pitch and resin, over a great fire, the flames of which rose thirty yards high; but all this could not terrify the brave child. After the lapse of some hours he was taken out unhurt, and put into a filthy, gloomy dungeon, and finally, after he had been brought a few times before the tribunal of his cruel father, he was condemned to be thrown to the wild beasts in the public amphitheatre. But

Confirmed  
by an ex-  
ample.

<sup>1</sup> Peto nate, ut aspicias cœlum; ita fiet ut non timeas carnificem istum. Pereuntes septem filios sub unius diei tempore conspiciens, bono animo ferebat, propter spem quam in Deum habebat.—II. Mach. vii. 30.

the beasts refused to touch him, and showed him every mark of respect; and at last he was beheaded, and thus ended by death his glorious combat. How did such a tender youth become so brave? Simply because he had once seen a small token from the kingdom of heaven. For when the holy martyr Julianus was by the command of Martianus being led through the streets of Antioch, laden with chains and covered with wounds, and exposed to the mockery of all, the little Celsus happened to be looking out of the window of his school, and he saw on the martyr's head a precious crown, while from all his wounds shone a most resplendent light, and by his side walked thirty persons of noble aspect who accompanied him. The boy was astonished at the sight, and turning to his master and school-fellows, cried out: Oh, what do I see? there is that condemned Christian whom the executioners are leading away, and I see on his head a golden crown set with diamonds, while a light comes from him that outshines the sun. Our lictors are leading him to public disgrace and martyrdom; but his God gives him noble companions. Truly a God of that kind must be the true God; I acknowledge Him as such and find in this profession the utmost contentment of mind. For His sake I will suffer what I see this Christian suffering; the same God that he adores I will also look on as my God! For what is there worth having in this life, where everything passes away and comes to an end with time? I will earn for myself a time that shall never end. I will strive for a light and a crown that no one will ever take from me. So saying he threw down his books and school utensils, and ran after the martyr. The teacher and his school-fellows hurried after him to restrain him, but to no purpose. He tore himself out of their hands, ran up to Julianus, embraced him, kissed his wounds, weeping most tenderly, and begged of him earnestly to take him as his inseparable companion and worshipper of his God. In vain did the soldiers try to drive him away, and at last they made him fast to the chains with which Julianus was bound, and brought him before Martianus. Thus he suffered the same martyrdom and received the same crown as Julianus. Marianilla, his mother, although she had been a most bitter pagan, became a zealous Christian, for she too saw a very small token of heaven. When she went to her son Celsus in prison in the hope of bringing him back to the worship of idols, the holy youth and all his fellow-prisoners for the faith prayed earnestly for her conversion; then she saw

a brilliant light, and was sensible of a most sweet perfume which was so delicious that she acknowledged she never experienced such pleasure in her whole life. Thereupon she declared herself a Christian; she braved the wrath of her tyrannical husband, offered her head to the executioner, and gained for her soul eternal joys. See how powerful is even a dim recollection of heaven.

My dear brethren, let us often make use of this medicine, for it is useful, nay, necessary in the prosperous as well as the adverse circumstances of this life in order to keep us faithful to the service of God. "Look upon heaven" in all occurrences, like the mother of the Machabees. Let us raise the eyes of the mind to heaven in prosperity that our hearts may not become attached to worldly goods. Let us raise them thither in trouble and adversity that we may bear everything with patience and courage. Palladius tells us that whenever the Abbot Apollo saw any of his brethren sad and melancholy, he used to speak to him as follows: My dear brother, why should we be sad? Let those give way to sadness who care only for the things of earth and to whom the hope of heaven brings no comfort. Jesus Christ has promised us eternal happiness; our hope does not deceive us, we are going to heaven; what then should we trouble about? The same words I should like to say to every afflicted Christian who is downcast and almost driven to desperation either by poverty, or constant illness, or because he is abandoned by all, or by the loss of temporal goods, or by the trials and annoyances that he has daily to contend with: How is this, dear brother, dear sister? why do you moan and weep? Why are you so downhearted? Is your conscience perhaps not right before God? If so, then weep away, for you have good reason! But if that is not the case; if you are heartily sorry that you have ever offended God; if you have candidly confessed your sins and are determined to serve God faithfully in future, why, then, should you be sad? Only think of the everlasting joys of heaven that will be your inheritance, and you will forget this short-lived sorrow. And these words I shall also apply to myself in future; and that they may recur to my mind all the quicker in every circumstance, I will acquire the holy habit of every day frequently raising my heart to heaven; I will think of it when I rise in the morning, and sigh forth: ah, when will the time come for me to ascend thither in order to see my God? I will

Exhortation  
and resolution  
to think  
of heaven in  
all circum-  
stances.

think of it when I retire to rest in the evening; in heaven I shall find eternal rest! I will think of it when dressing or undressing; ah, I must be careful not to lose the wedding-garment of sanctifying grace, that I may one day be adorned with the garment of glory in heaven. I will think of it when eating or drinking. I shall be satiated, O Lord! when I shall see Thy glory in heaven. I will think of it in trouble or affliction; by this I can earn heaven as a reward. In cold and heat, in hunger and thirst I will think: I shall have nothing of this to suffer in heaven. When I hear or see anything pleasing I will say to myself: O heaven! what beauty I shall behold in thee! what sweet sounds I shall hear in thee! Whenever people speak to me of the happiness of this world, how rich that man is, how highly he is esteemed by the great, etc., what! I will say to myself, is that worth talking of? Far different is the happiness that awaits me in heaven. When I enter the church either to pray or to hear a sermon, I will think: by hearing this sermon I will encourage myself in the divine service in order that I may gain still more happiness in heaven; and I will pray, with the Catholic Church, "that Thou lift up our minds to heavenly desires, we beseech Thee to hear us!" "Thy kingdom come!" Thus, like the holy apostle St. Paul, although I am still on earth amongst men I shall be always in heaven in desire, and shall be able to say: "Our conversation is in heaven,"<sup>1</sup> until I actually possess what I have so often longed for and desired, and enter body and soul into the eternal joys of heaven, to which my thoughts and wishes are always tending. Amen.

*Another introduction to the same sermon for the third Sunday after Epiphany.*

#### Text.

*Multi ab oriente et occidente venient et recumbent cum Abraham et Isaac et Jacob in regno cœlorum.*—Matt. viii. 11.

"Many shall come from the east, and the west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven."

#### Introduction.

Shall strangers then possess this beautiful heaven while the children of the kingdom are cast out into the exterior darkness?

<sup>1</sup> *Nostra conversatio in cœlis est.*—Philipp. iii. 20.

Yes; so it shall be. By the children of the kingdom are meant the Jews who in those days were still the chosen children of God, to whom Christ, Our Lord, first preached the Gospel Himself and by His apostles; but as that people obstinately refused to believe through malice and perversity, they were abandoned by the disciples of Christ, and the heathens had the happiness of being instructed in the Christian faith and converted to God. Paul and Barnabas openly reproached the Jews with this: "To you it behoved us first to speak the word of God: but because you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold we turn to the gentiles;"<sup>1</sup> they will believe in Christ and many of them will inherit His kingdom. My dear brethren, we in this country are descended from heathens. Oh, more than happy they who, wherever they come from, shall possess the kingdom of heaven! Hitherto we have been considering its infinite joys and delights by way of meditation in order to inflame our desires for it all the more; but what will all that avail us if, as is usually the case after sermons, we forget all about it again? Ah, dear Christians, let it not be so with us! Heaven, although we may never hear a sermon about it, is well worth often thinking of and desiring constantly. My object to-day is to excite you and myself to this constant recollection and desire of heaven. *Plan of discourse as above.*

<sup>1</sup> Vobis oportebat primum loqui verbum Dei: sed quoniam repellitis illud, et indignos vos iudicatis æternæ vitæ, ecce convertimur ad gentes.—Acts xiii. 46.

# CONSIDERATIONS ON THE TRUTHS EXPLAINED ABOVE.

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*On the Folly of Men in Taking Such Little Trouble  
to Secure Heaven.*

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## FIFTY-FIFTH SERMON.

### ON THE WANT OF FAITH IN HEAVEN.

#### Subject.

Many Christians either do not believe in heaven or else they do not desire it: 1. Because they take such little trouble to secure it; 2. Because they think it does not require hard work to gain heaven.—*Preached on the feast of SS. Peter and Paul.*

#### Text.

*Quem dicunt homines esse Filium hominis?*—Matt. xvi. 13.  
“Who do men say that the Son of man is?”

#### Introduction.

How widely different the opinions of men that came to light when the question was asked what they thought of Christ! Some took Him for John the Baptist, others for Elias, others thought Him to be Jeremias or one of the prophets. St. Peter alone, the prince of the apostles, being specially enlightened by God, gave the correct answer: “Simon Peter answered, and said: Thou art Christ, the Son of the living God.” And therefore he alone merited to hear the blessed words from the lips of Our Lord: “Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood hath not revealed it to thee, but My Father who is in



heaven. And I will give to thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven." My dear brethren, on the past feast days we have ascended in thought into heaven, and contemplated its infinite delights in order to inflame our minds with the desire of possessing them. But if one were to ask the question: what do men say that heaven is? what do they think of the joys of the eternal city of God? oh, what erroneous opinions and judgments would then come to light! How few we should find who could give a correct answer! Truly, when I consider the life led by many Christians, I do not know which I must doubt: whether they have a true faith in heaven, or whether they are really in earnest about desiring to get there. One of these must be the case, as I now proceed to show in this sermon.

### Plan of Discourse.

*Many Christians either do not believe in heaven or do not desire it. Why so? Because they take such little trouble to secure it; the first part. Because they think it does not require hard work to gain heaven; the second part. Both concern tepid Christians who are slothful in the divine service, in order to spur them on to greater zeal. Those who are evidently wicked sinners can see from this sermon how far they are from the road to heaven, and what small hope they have of ever getting there unless they seriously amend their lives.*

Grant us all Thy light, O Holy Ghost! We ask it of Thee through the intercession of Mary and of our holy guardian angels.

When one takes little trouble to secure a great good on which much depends, it is a clear proof either that he does not value it at its proper worth, or that he does not really desire it. A wealthy prince (so let us suppose) has amassed a vast sum of money, like that which Solomon inherited from his father David for the building of the wonderful temple of Jerusalem, of which I spoke to you on a former occasion, namely, over a hundred thousand hundred weight of gold, and a million hundred weight of silver. Now this prince causes the following notice to be published everywhere through the city: This afternoon, at two o'clock, the prince will go out to take a walk in the neighboring fields and meadows; while he is out his treasury will be opened and every one will be allowed to take as much out of it

To take little trouble to secure a great treasure is a sign that one does not know its value or desire it. Shown by a simile.

as he pleases; no one will be denied access to it. But this permission shall last only during the time that the prince is absent from his palace taking a walk; when he returns the treasury shall be closed again. What do you think of this, my dear brethren? What a commotion it would cause in the town! Poor citizens, what would you think of such a favorable opportunity? Would you fail to profit by this short and uncertain although precious time in which you might become rich! would you sleep or sit it idly out? I imagine I am looking at the whole affair. The approach to the palace is thronged already at midday by people who have forgotten their meals in their eagerness to be in time; every one desires to be the first to enter after the prince leaves, so as to be able to take away as much money as possible. The lame and crippled become on such an occasion smart and active, and work with both hands to fill their pockets, and sacks, and clothes, as far as they will hold it, with money. I imagine the crowd would be so great as to endanger one's life. Blows and kicks would certainly be interchanged between those who come and those who are hurrying out; but no one would be less eager to advance on that account. It does not matter, the people would think, if I have a broken head, as long as I can bring home plenty of money. But, I cry out to them, why do you crowd together so? Go quietly to work! The treasury is great enough, and contains much more than all of you could carry away. Yes, they answer, that is right enough, if we only knew how long the prince is to remain absent. Perhaps he will return immediately, and then the treasury will be closed in our faces. No, no! this is not a time for delaying; it is likely we shall never have such an opportunity of becoming rich offered us again. Suppose now that one or the other who is really in need of money for his support, and who could be the first at the treasury if he wished, is actually too lazy to stir a step out of his house, because he is with pleasant company engaged at play, what would you think of that man? He laughs at your credulity; he is perfectly certain that all the outcry about the open treasury is nonsense; or otherwise he has no desire to take anything out of it; if he had he would surely give up his talk and card-playing in order not to allow such a good chance to escape him.

God offers  
us endless

O Christians! what a wretched simile this is to explain what our faith teaches us of the future life of the just! But what a de-

plorable fact that even this very simile must cause us to blush with shame, and condemn our sloth and laziness in the divine service. The King of kings opens his treasury—His heaven—and offers to men all that He has therein. And what sort of a treasure is it? A hundred thousand times a thousand million of hundred weight of gold and silver? A palace, a city built of precious stones? Eh! these and similar things are mere shadows and figures to help our weak understanding, as long as it is clothed with flesh, to grasp in some measure the happiness of the next life, for it cannot form any idea of it otherwise. What we shall receive in heaven as a reward is an infinite, immense good,—the supreme God Himself. “I am Thy protector, and Thy reward exceeding great,”<sup>1</sup> He says to Abraham and to all the faithful. We shall see God; we shall possess God completely; we shall love God; we shall rejoice in God; we shall have in God all imaginable joys and happiness, and that for all eternity, without ever fearing that it shall come to an end. And mark that we need not trouble about anything further; this treasury is open to all; every man has full leave and permission to share in it by every meritorious work he performs, and to amass as many treasures of glory as he wishes in God. Nor is there any crowding or pushing here on account of the multitude of people; heaven is not a small treasure-chamber. “In My Father’s house there are many mansions,”<sup>2</sup> such is the assurance given us by Christ; there is room for all; the multitude pressing for entrance cannot crowd the door; the number who come for a share in the treasure cannot lessen it. When here on earth there are many children to share an inheritance, each one gets but a small portion. The heavenly inheritance is inexhaustible, for God Himself shall be the infinite and eternal lot of each one. Come forward, then, boldly! Take as much as you wish and can carry off with you.

But what time has been proclaimed? what hour appointed in which we can strive for this heavenly, eternal treasure? The King of heaven has announced that to us by the apostle St. Paul: “Behold, now is the acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.”<sup>3</sup> Now, while we are together, and as long as we live it is free to us to gain heaven. “Trade till I come,”<sup>4</sup> is the word spoken to all by the holy Evangelist St. Luke; trade

treasures in  
heaven.

This life is  
the time  
for us to  
gain it.

<sup>1</sup> Ego protector tuus sum, et merces tua magna nimis.—Gen. xv. 1.

<sup>2</sup> In domo Patris mei mansiones multe sunt.—John xiv. 2.

<sup>3</sup> Ecce nunc tempus acceptabile, ecce nunc dies salutis.—II. Cor. vi. 2.

<sup>4</sup> Negotiamini dum venio.—Luke xix. 13.

till I come to bring you out of the world; work to gain heaven as long as you live; hereafter there will be an end to all work; what is not gained now is lost for all eternity. O dear Lord! Thou sayest, "till I come." And when wilt Thou come? How long wilt Thou remain away? Give us some idea of this, so that we may arrange accordingly, and that Thy coming may not be perhaps when we are just beginning to put our hands in Thy treasury, in order to gain heaven. Alas! if we are caught then, the door will be shut in our faces, and we shall be turned away empty-handed. No; trade and work for heaven till I come. The time of My coming is not fixed; whether it will be by day or night, in the morning or the evening, in sleeping or waking moments: you must know nothing of this; all I say to each and every one is: "Be you also ready: because at what hour you know not the Son of man will come."<sup>1</sup> For you, O man! for this or that one there may still perhaps be a year; for that other perhaps not even a day; for me this very hour in which I am speaking may be my last, and the King of heaven may now come to fetch me.

And if we  
do not work  
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ever.

"Therefore, whilst we have time let us work good," such is the warning given us by St. Paul; let us set to work to gather in the treasures of heaven while we have time; the time is short and its duration uncertain: "In doing good let us not fail."<sup>2</sup> A great deal depends on this; there is no question now of a temporal treasure. If I now lose an opportunity of making money I can repair my loss afterwards; and if I do not gain, I have suffered no further loss except that I did not make money when I could have done so. But far different is the business we have in hand when we undertake to gain heaven in the uncertain time of our lives; if I neglect anything in that, I shall never have an opportunity of repairing my loss; if I do not win heaven altogether it is lost to me completely. Nay, what is most terrible of all, if I do not become eternally happy I shall be eternally miserable, besides suffering that loss; if I do not come to God in heaven, I shall, besides being excluded therefrom, have to dwell with the demons in hell; there is no alternative. "Therefore, whilst we have time let us work good."

But most  
men are

There, my dear brethren, we have what faith teaches us of heaven, and of the ways and means of gaining it. "Believest

<sup>1</sup> Estote parati, quia qua nescitis hora Filius hominis venturus est.—Matt. xxiv. 44.

<sup>2</sup> Ergo dum tempus habemus operemur bonum. Bonum autem facientes non deficiamus.—Gal. vi. 10, 9.

thou this?"<sup>1</sup> Our Lord asked Martha, after He had explained to her about the eternal life that is to follow the resurrection of the dead. Let me now put the same question to many Christians and Catholics: "Believest thou this?" do you believe and believe firmly that your last end is heaven? that your eternal happiness is in heaven? that the great God Himself shall be the measure of your happiness? that you must, in the short and uncertain time of this life, prepare and merit that happiness for yourselves? Do you believe this? I am not speaking to you, O wicked sinners! who spend the days and years of your lives in vice, for it is clear and evident that you are stone-blind, that you have no true knowledge of heaven; for not only do you not work for it, but you do all in your power to have yourselves violently excluded from it. My question is addressed to you, slothful Christians who are careless in the divine service, who appear not to belong to the number of the wicked, and yet do not deserve the name of pious and zealous servants of God; you who spend the greater part of your time in idleness, or in doing things that are useless for the salvation of your souls; you who in all things seek yourselves, your comforts, and the gratification of your senses, or who are so sunk in sordid cares, in your domestic and other duties, that you find no relish for heavenly things and works of devotion, who hardly think of God once or twice in the day, who make nothing of sins unless they are evidently grievous, who rarely examine your consciences to see how they stand with God, except once a year when you go to confession, who say your short prayers, that you now and then offer to God, in a cold, distracted manner, who perform your daily tasks and duties without the good intention, without any regard for God or heaven, without a supernatural motive: and with all this you have little patience in adversity, little devotion in the church, little charity and mercy towards the poor, little zeal for the honor of God, little inclination for hearing sermons or reading spiritual books, for overcoming and mortifying evil propensities, for humility and other Christian virtues. In a word, you are neither hot nor cold, neither pious nor wicked; you live as if you were created only for this world. Again I ask you, tepid Christians, do you believe this? Do you believe that such a great treasure of eternal reward is open for you in heaven?

And what do you do to gain it? Show us the care and trouble **They do**

<sup>1</sup> *Credis hoc?*—John xi. 26.

nothing to  
gain heav-  
en.

you have hitherto taken for it? To believe that such an immense good is there spread out before you, and to go to such little pains to get possession of it, how can that be explained? Do you do as much to gain heaven as sinners do, as you yourselves have perhaps done before now, to accomplish a sinful action, to be revenged on an enemy, to enjoy the forbidden love of a creature, to get possession unjustly of what belongs to another, to lose your souls eternally? For shame that I should have to ask such a question that should cause you to feel the utmost confusion! Do you work as hard for heaven as those people of the simile to get the money out of the royal treasury? Do you do as much for heaven as those athletes among the Romans of old who contended in the public games in order to gain a crown of victory and the applause of the public? The Apostle writes of them to the Corinthians: "Every one that striveth for the mastery refraineth himself from all things," from excess in eating and drinking, from too much comfort, from all that might enervate the body and weaken the limbs; no mortification is too great for them, no wounds which they expect too painful; the danger of death even they despise, and all that in the hope of gaining the crown of victory. And what sort of a crown? asks Paul. Ah! "And they indeed that they may receive a corruptible crown;" they do all that for a wreath of withered laurel leaves; what then, he continues, should we not do to gain the imperishable crown of eternal glory? "But we an incorruptible one."<sup>1</sup> Do you do as much for heaven as you do to regain your health if it is in any way affected? as you still do to make some profit, or to secure success in your domestic arrangements, to get a good situation, to gain a lawsuit, to curry favor with the great, to please some mortal, to look after your bodily comforts? Is then heaven, eternal happiness, of less importance than all this trumpery that will come to an end with this short life? Ah, if even a tenth part of the trouble were devoted to gaining heaven, things would not be in such a bad state.

They have  
no inclin-  
ation or lik-  
ing for it.

But there is no use in talking of working for heaven; people hardly ever think of it; or if they do, what impression does the thought leave on their minds? Talk to a worldling, a tepid Christian, about heaven when he is troubled or sad; say to him: be comforted; God has sent you this affliction for your good; it is

<sup>1</sup> Omnis qui in agone contendit, ab omnibus se abstinet; et illi quidem, ut corruptibilem coronam accipiant; nos autem incorruptam.—1. Cor. ix. 25.

by means of such things that we earn heaven, and when we go there we shall rejoice forever. Say to him when he is lying sick in bed: be patient, my friend; what a beautiful crown this will gain for you in heaven! Tell him about the riches and treasures of heaven when he has suffered some loss. If he is put to shame or confusion before the world, speak to him of the high honor that the saints enjoy in heaven. If he mourns the death of a dear friend, tell him of the company of the elect that the deceased enjoys in the next world, and so forth; and see how he will take your exhortations. He will answer you with sighs and groans, and if you still continue to try to console him in that way, he will turn his back on you in disgust. So little impression can such thoughts make on him. And why should we wonder at that? These subjects have hitherto hardly ever entered into his cold and tepid heart; rarely, if ever, has he thought seriously of heaven, and therefore the subject is an insipid one to him. But if you wish to give a consolation that he will eagerly accept, I will tell you what to do: tell him that he has just been left heir to some thousands; after shedding a few tears to the memory of his departed friend, tears that he will soon forget, he will feel quite consoled for the loss he has suffered. Bring him a document from the court to show that he has been raised to some honorable position, and he will think no more of the shame he was put to. Speak to him of his approaching marriage, or of some pleasant companions, and his melancholy will soon disappear. So easily do we console ourselves in this miserable world with fresh miseries.

O heaven of joys! what immense treasures thou hast! but in this case thou canst do little or nothing. Small is the trouble or labor we undergo for thy sake; little do we think of thee; we have no pleasure or comfort in thee, and what must necessarily follow, our faith in thee is very weak! Holy Prophet David! well hast thou spoken of those men when thou didst compare them to the dumb beast that has no understanding or power of reflection: "Man, when he was in honor did not understand;" when he was invited to eternal honor he did not understand: "He is compared to senseless beasts and is become like to them,"<sup>1</sup> to beasts that have no other pleasure but to have plenty of corn and hay to eat. An eternal heaven is offered to any one who wishes

Hence they do not believe in heaven, or do not desire it.

<sup>1</sup> Homo cum in honore esset, non intellexit: comparatus est jumentis insipientibus, et similis factus est illis.—Ps. xlviii. 13.

to accept it; but the slothful, tepid man does not understand it; he does not believe in it, and therefore he does not trouble himself about it. I know well the bald excuses that tepid Christians make. I do no harm, they say; as far as I know I do not commit any grievous sin; I do not lead a wicked or vicious life. Thus they imagine they are all right, and that they need not go to any further trouble. But in this they fall into a grievous error against the very foundation of our belief in heaven, as I shall show in the

### Second Part.

To gain  
heaven it is  
not enough  
to abstain  
from evil.  
Shown by a  
simile.

I do no harm, commit no grievous sin. So you think, because you are buried in sloth, in temporal cares, or in idleness, and you pay no heed to your interior life, although it is hardly possible for you to keep your conscience pure for such a long time. But I will not now dispute this point with you; granted that it is true, as you say, that you do no harm, do you imagine that all that is required to gain heaven is to do no evil? Tell me this: you have a servant in your house who never does any harm, or anything against you; he sits the whole day with folded hands, or goes about the rooms without putting his hand to any work; or if he does anything, it is only some trumpery affair that is of no use to your housekeeping: would you pay that servant his yearly wage? No, you say; I would not on any account. And if you were asked whether you had a good servant, you would answer, no; I cannot keep that servant any longer. Why? Does he steal from you? No; I have no complaint to make in that respect. Does he allow strangers to make away with your things? No. Is he a drunkard? No. Does he give scandal to your children by bad language or example? No. Does he keep up an improper intimacy with any one? No. Does he answer you disrespectfully when you speak to him? No. And why then do you refuse to pay him? He does nothing; he is always idle, and I have not hired him for that. It is not enough for me that he does no harm; he must work and earn his wages by his industry. Now this very answer of yours is the judgment of God on the excuse you allege in favor of your tepidity. You do not commit mortal sin; you are not a blasphemer or addicted to cursing; you are not an adulterer, a drunkard, a thief, a murderer, a vindictive or uncharitable man; all the better for you if it is true: but you do little or nothing for God's sake; you sit idle the



whole day as far as the practice of virtue and the divine service is concerned; all your thoughts, words, and actions are directed to yourself, to your own profit, comfort, and pleasure; you do nothing for heaven, for your last end. Was it for that that God called you to His service? Do you think that He will give you the eternal joys of heaven as a reward for such a life?

Or do you imagine that heaven will come to you of its own accord if you do not run away from it? For instance, you think of travelling to Coblenz; now sit down where you are, or remain standing, if you choose; be very careful not to go a step farther for Coblenz, and of course in that way you will at last arrive at the end of your journey; is that not so? No, you acknowledge; that will not do; I must stir myself and set out for Coblenz. To live in mortal sin is indeed to go away from heaven and to travel towards hell; and that you are careful to avoid, as you say; but more than that is required to gain heaven. "Decline from evil;" that is one thing but not all, for besides that, "do good;" travel bravely forward to the heavenly country, "and dwell forever and ever."<sup>1</sup> "Why stand you looking up to heaven?"<sup>2</sup> thus idly? said the angel to the disciples after the ascension of Christ. This is not the time for standing; go at once and follow the example of your divine Master if you wish to follow Him into heaven. In Holy Writ heaven is described as the wages that the workmen receive in the evening after having toiled during the day: "Call the laborers," says the householder to his steward, as we read in the Gospel of St. Matthew, "and pay them their hire."<sup>3</sup> The Wise Man likens it to a treasure hidden in the ground: "If thou shalt seek her as money and shalt dig for her as for a treasure."<sup>4</sup> St. Paul speaks of it as a crown of victory: "He also that striveth for the mastery is not crowned except he strive lawfully."<sup>5</sup> It is likened to the crops reaped in harvest-time: "They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. Going they went and wept, casting their seeds. But coming, they shall come with joyfulness, carrying their sheaves;"<sup>6</sup> and to a kingdom conquered with great violence: "The kingdom of heaven

We must labor for it by good works. Shown by a simile from Scripture.

<sup>1</sup> Declina a malo, et fac bonum, et inhabita in sæculum sæculi.—Ps. xxxvi. 27.

<sup>2</sup> Quid statis aspicientes in cælum?—Acts i. 11.

<sup>3</sup> Voca operarios, et redde illis mercedem.—Matt. xx. 8.

<sup>4</sup> Si quasieris eam, quasi pecuniam, et sicut thesauros effoderis illam.—Prov. ii. 4.

<sup>5</sup> Qui certat in agone, non coronatur, nisi legitime certaverit.—II. Tim. ii. 5.

<sup>6</sup> Qui seminant in lachrymis, in exultatione metent. Euntes ibant et siebant mittentes semina sua. Venientes autem venient cum exultatione, portantes manipulos suos.—Ps. cxxv. 5-7.

suffereth violence, and the violent bear it away.”<sup>1</sup> Now there is good reason for refusing wages to him who has not worked diligently, although otherwise he has done no evil. If you do not wish to possess the treasure, all you need do is to refrain from digging, and of itself it will remain hidden from you. To lose a victory or a country you have only to throw down your arms and surrender to the enemy; keep quiet and do not defend yourself when he approaches and you will surely be overcome. The peasant who sows his land with weeds and stones will certainly reap no fruit; but he need not go to even that trouble; all he has to do is to sit still and leave his land untilled. And you, O slothful Christian! hope to enter heaven by idling your time away, by doing nothing, although as you imagine, you are not guilty of any grievous sin?

Confirmed  
by gospel  
parables.

Do you know what happened to the fig-tree of which the Lord speaks in the Gospel of St. Matthew? “Seeing a certain fig-tree by the wayside, He came to it, and found nothing on it but leaves only;” at once the tree was cursed: “and He saith to it: May no fruit grow on thee henceforward forever, and immediately the fig-tree withered away.”<sup>2</sup> But why so? The tree did not bring forth evil fruit, and it had splendid leaves? No matter: “Every tree therefore that doth not yield good fruit shall be cut down and cast into the fire.”<sup>3</sup> What tree shall be cast into the fire? The tree that bears evil fruit? Yes, and also that which does not bear good fruit. Have you never heard or read in the same Gospel the parable of the servant who hid his talent in the ground, and gave it uninjured to his master when the latter returned? Read and ponder on it attentively, for it seems written expressly for you. “Wicked and slothful servant,” said the master to him in an angry voice; was that the reason I entrusted the talent to you? “Thou oughtest therefore to have committed my money to the bankers, and at my coming I should have received my own with usury.” Away with him at once! “The unprofitable servant cast ye out into the exterior darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” Ah, Lord, how stern Thou art to the poor servant! He has done no wrong.

<sup>1</sup> Regnum coelorum vim patitur, et violenti rapiunt illud.—Matt. xi. 12.

<sup>2</sup> Videns fici arborem unam secus viam, venit ad eam, et nihil invenit in ea, nisi folia tantum: ait illi; nunquam ex te fructus nascatur in sempiternum: et arefacta est continuo ficulnea.—Ibid. xxi. 19.

<sup>3</sup> Omnis arbor quæ non facit fructum bonum, excidetur et in ignem mittetur.—Ibid. iii. 10.

He has not gambled away thy money, or spent it in drinking. He has kept it carefully, so that no thief could make away with it. He "going his way digged into the earth, and hid his lord's money;" and now he gives it back to thee to the last farthing: "Behold here thou hast that which is thine."<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless away with that servant! I do not accuse him of being a gambler, a drunkard, a spendthrift, or a thief; he is an unprofitable servant, who has allowed My talent to lie idle; therefore away with him into the exterior darkness. Ah, exclaims St. Bernard, filled with awe at reading this passage, "what must wickedness deserve if mere unprofitableness deserves damnation!"<sup>2</sup>

No, O slothful Christian! no longer think or say as you have hitherto done: I do no wrong; I do not curse, or steal, or commit adultery; this sloth in the divine service is already a great evil against God, and against the maxims of the Gospel of Christ. Bring that lame excuse of yours before the judgment-seat of God, and if you appear there empty-handed, and have not many good works to present to the Almighty, you will hear, to your sorrow, when it will be too late, what sort of a sentence shall be passed on you. The Judge will then pass sentence on each; how? "To every man according to his works."<sup>3</sup> "Depart from Me, you cursed, into everlasting fire," He will say. Why? Because you have ill-treated Me by your bad and vicious lives? No; not a word shall be said of that. But, "I was hungry, and you gave Me not to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me not to drink; I was a stranger, and you took Me not in; naked, and you covered Me not; sick and in prison, and you did not visit Me."<sup>4</sup> The reason of your damnation is not merely what you have done against Me, but also what you have omitted and not done to please Me.

The Judge shall condemn men to hell for having omitted to do good.

Repeat now your ordinary excuse: I have not done much harm. What, He will say, wicked and slothful servant! where are the talents I entrusted to you? Where are the graces and good inspirations that I so often addressed to you Myself, and so often by means of others, speaking to your heart to encourage you to serve Me with zeal? Where are the frequent helps and

And for not having made a good use of their gifts and talents.

<sup>1</sup> *Serve male et piger: oportuit ergo te committere pecuniam meam numulariis, et veniens ego, recepissem utique, quod meum est cum usura. Inutilem servum ejicite in tenebras exteriores; illic erit fletus et stridor dentium. Abiens fodit in terram et abscondit pecuniam domini sui. Ecce habes quod tuum est.*—Matt. xxv. 26, 27, 30, 18, 25.

<sup>2</sup> *Attende quid meretur iniquitas, si sola ad damnationem sufficit inutilitas.*

<sup>3</sup> *Unicuique secundum opera ejus.*—Matt. xvi. 27.

<sup>4</sup> *Discedite a me maledicti in ignem eternum. Esurivi enim, et non dedistis mihi manducare: sitivi et non dedistis mihi potum: hospes eram, et non collegistis me: nudus, et non cooperuistis me: infirmus et in carcere, et non visitastis me.*—ibid. xxv. 41-43.

opportunities of doing good that I gave you in a Catholic town or country every day of your life, in preference to so many others? What use have you made of all these? What have you gained during all the years of your life? How much alms have you given to My poor who represent My own Person? What other works of Christian charity and mercy have you performed? How many virtuous acts of faith, hope, humility, meekness, patience, mortification, and self-denial can you point to? With what prayers or works of devotion have you implored My mercy, blessed My name, promoted My honor and glory? How have you profited by the frequent reception of the holy sacraments, the hearing of sermons, the reading of spiritual books? "Why then didst thou not give My money into the bank, that at My coming I might have exacted it with usury?"<sup>1</sup> Why? Has My help or time or opportunity been wanting to you? Now you wish to enter heaven, to share in My glory with My faithful servants; why? what is your title? what claim have you on Me? Perhaps because you have served your body, your senses, the world, better than Me? Why should I give you an eternal reward? Because you have hardly thought of Me once in the day? Because you have ordered your day so directly in opposition to the Christian laws and fundamental truths? You rose in the morning at seven or eight o'clock; you said your morning prayer while dressing, or before the looking-glass, if you even thought that much of Me, and that with as little reverence as if you were talking to a servant; and it was no better in the evening. Afterwards you sometimes heard Mass with the same amount of devotion, and then you spent your time in eating, drinking, walking, paying visits, gambling, in order to amuse yourself. All your other cares and anxieties were devoted to temporal things; not the fortieth part of your time was given to Me. So the days, months, years, have passed without fruit or profit for your soul, without merit. And you think that such a life is like My poor, humble, laborious, crucified life! And you now ask heaven as a reward for it!

The tepid  
shall be up-  
braided by  
the saints,  
who had to

Hear ye this, My holy servants, apostles, martyrs, confessors, virgins! This man wishes to go to heaven to be a sharer of your joy and glory! What do you think of him? Did you get heaven so cheaply, when in your innocence you crucified your flesh

<sup>1</sup> Quare non dedisti pecuniam meam ad mensam, ut ego veniens cum usuris utique ex-  
grassem illam?—Luke xix. 23.

with constant mortifications, suffered hunger, thirst, persecution, and trials, even to death, for My sake? Hear this, ye saints who were formerly princes, kings, emperors, queens, and empresses, who laid down your crowns at My feet, voluntarily left your courts, and retired into convents and solitudes in order to make more sure of coming to heaven! This man wishes to have the same happiness as you, although he has done nothing for it. He wishes to have the reward that cost Me thirty-three years' toil and labor, and My life-blood in addition, to gain for you. What do you think of this? Eh! I will allow yourself, slothful Christian! to pronounce sentence. Would you pay so dearly your own servant if he had served you as you have Me? Would you give him an eternal reward? No; no labor, no pay; no work, no rest; no merit, no heaven. Go; let the world that you have served pay you; from Me you have nothing to expect. "The unprofitable servant cast ye out into the exterior darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

Ah, my dear brethren, let us not be in the number of those half-believing, lazy Christians! "We pray and beseech you in the Lord Jesus," I conclude with the words of St. Paul, "that as you have received of us how you ought to walk and to please God, so also you would walk that you may abound the more ... and that you do your own business,"<sup>1</sup> and work out your salvation with diligence. Bernard, why art thou here? this saint would often say to himself. And so should each one of us say to himself daily: why am I in this world? For what am I created? To eat, drink, sleep, waste my time? Eh! that is the happiness of the dumb beast! I am a far nobler creature. What is the business that I have to do here? Is it to make myself rich or honored before men? No; such things cannot satisfy my heart. Why am I then in the world? To serve my God, to enrich my soul, to gain the eternal joys of heaven. That is my business, my most important business, my sole and only business. If I do not gain heaven, alas! then everything is lost forever! Therefore in future I will devote my whole attention to this business; I will work most diligently for heaven, lay aside my former tepidity, and serve God with the utmost zeal. Every morning I will say to myself: perhaps this is the last day for me to attend to the business of my eternal salvation; how much I have lost already for

Exhortation and resolution by diligence in good works to make sure of heaven.

<sup>1</sup> Rogamus vos et obsecramus in Domino Jesu, ut quemadmodum accepistis a nobis, quomodo oporteat vos ambulare, et placere Deo, sic et ambuletis ut abundetis magis ... et ut vestrum negotium agatis.—I. Thess. iv. 1, 11.

eternity! Therefore to-day at least I will labor in earnest; all my thoughts, words, and daily duties shall be directed to heaven by the good intention; heaven shall spur me on to true devotion and to the frequent practice of virtue; heaven shall make me humble, patient in adversity, constant in temptation, until at last I shall possess for all eternity as an exceeding great reward for my labor that happiness which is now shown me afar off by the faith. Amen.

*Another introduction to the same sermon for the Feast of the Ascension.*

### Text.

*Qui crediderit, et baptizatus fuerit, salvus erit.*—Mark xvi. 16.  
 “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.”

### Introduction.

Rejoice and be glad, Catholic Christians! Heaven is ours! Listen: “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.” But we are all baptized. We have no reasonable cause to doubt that. Thanks be to Thee, O most generous God! for having granted us this happiness in preference to so many heathens! We all believe without exception, and with the only true, saving, Catholic faith. Again thanks to Thee, O good God! for having given us this light in preference to so many heretics! Therefore we shall all be saved! Truly, there can be no doubt of that; we have a document to that effect signed by the infallible word of Jesus Christ. He speaks clearly enough: “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.” But let us not rejoice too soon; the devil might otherwise rob us of our joy. It is true, says St. Gregory, speaking of the words of the text, that he shall be saved whose faith is shown by his works. Alas! there is an end to my joy! The words of Christ are and remain true, my dear brethren; but when I consider their works, I see that many Catholics have not the true faith, and therefore they shall not enter heaven. I do not now intend to examine the articles of faith; I have done so on another occasion. I will confine myself simply to the consideration of heaven, where Jesus Christ, the Head of all the faithful, ascended on this day, and where He invites us to share in His joy and glory. I say then—*Plan of Discourse as above.*

**FIFTY-SIXTH SERMON.**

**ON AVOIDING IDLENESS IF WE WISH TO GAIN HEAVEN.**

**Subject.**

An idle life can bring no man to eternal life. Therefore he who desires to go to heaven must avoid idleness.—*Preached on the seventh Sunday after Pentecost.*

**Text.**

*Omnis arbor quæ non facit fructum bonum, excidetur et in ignem mittetur.*—Matt. vii. 19.

“Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit shall be cut down and shall be cast into the fire.”

**Introduction.**

Let those words be weighed attentively by all those who spend the most of their time in incessant worldly cares, or in idleness, doing nothing, vain amusements, and useless occupations. Do these people imagine that such a life will bring them to heaven? Ah, that cannot be: “Not every one that saith to Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven,” as we read in to-day’s Gospel, “but he that doth the will of My Father who is in heaven, he shall enter into the kingdom of heaven.” And what is to become of those good-for-nothing people who produce no fruit of good works? My text answers that question: “Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit shall be cut down and shall be cast into the fire.” In a word, idlers shall have no share in heaven, as I now mean to prove.

**Plan of Discourse.**

*An idle life can bring no man to eternal life. Therefore he who desires to go to heaven must avoid idleness. Such is the whole subject of this discourse.*

And that we may not pass this hour idly, that is, without fruit for our souls, we humbly beg Thy light and help, O Holy Ghost! through the intercession of Mary and of the holy angels.

A vicious  
life can  
bring no  
one to heav-  
en.

The whole proof of my proposition consists in this one argument: a vicious life cannot lead to eternal life; an idle life is a vicious one, and therefore an idle life cannot lead any one to eternal life. The first part of this argument you must admit to be true, for the only thing that can bar us out of heaven and condemn us to hell is sin. "The soul that sinneth, the same shall die." <sup>1</sup> So that all I need prove is that an idle life is a vicious one. If I succeed in doing that, the conclusion will follow of itself.

An idle life  
is a vicious  
one.  
Proved  
from the  
Fathers.

And such is the case, my dear brethren; idleness opens the door to all sorts of sin and vice. If I were to quote only the twentieth part of what the holy Fathers and Doctors of the Church, enlightened by the spirit of God, have written on this topic, my sermon would not come to an end to-day. Idleness is an enemy to virtue, a betrayer of youth, a spendthrift of time, a dangerous sleep of those who are awake, a poison for the souls of men, an incentive to impurity, a pleasing guest of hell, a soft cushion of the devil, a luxurious bed of all evil; such are the epithets applied to it by those writers when they speak of it in moderate terms. "You may look on it as quite certain," says St. Jerome, "that idleness is the mother of all concupiscence, uncleanness, and sin." St. Chrysostom says in nearly the same words: "idleness is, as it were, the mistress of all vices." "Idleness is a cesspool of temptations and bad thoughts," such are the words of St. Bernard. In a word, St. Augustine gives no hope of salvation to the idle man who has no becoming occupation: "He who loves idleness shall never be a citizen of heaven."

From Scrip-  
ture.

But why should we appeal to those witnesses when we have the infallible word of God itself on our side? "Send him to work, that he be not idle," is the warning of the Holy Ghost by the Wise Man; no matter who the person may be, of what sex or condition, rich or poor, young or old, let that person work, and have something to do and be not idle. Why? "For idleness hath taught much evil." <sup>2</sup> We read in the Gospel of St. Mark that when the infirm man who had a withered hand that he could not use came to Jesus in the synagogue to be healed, our dear Lord at once asked the Pharisees, "Is it lawful to do good on the Sabbath days, or to do evil? to save life or to de-

<sup>1</sup> Anima quæ peccaverit, ipsa morietur.—Ezech. xviii. 4.

<sup>2</sup> Mitte illum in operationem, ne vacet. Multam enim malitiam docuit otiositas.—Ecclesi. xxxiii. 28, 29.



stroy?"<sup>1</sup> Does not this question seem a strange one to you? The poor man wanted his hand cured, and Our Lord speaks of curing the soul? What connection is there between a withered hand and a human soul? St. Augustine gives a beautiful explanation of this. The hands, he says, are to the soul what the hand of a clock is to its interior works; the latter shows outwardly how much the clock has struck inwardly; if the hand remains still, the clock too is still inwardly, and gives forth no sound. Withered, idle hands are a sure sign of a bad and corrupt soul. Show me an idle man who has nothing to do, no serious occupation, and I can assure you that he will do much evil. If you hear of all sorts of dissolute actions, you will find on examination that they have been learned in the school of idleness; adultery and all kinds of impurity are children of an idle life, and are generally committed by those who forget the duties and occupations of their state. Thus far St. Augustine.

And indeed, if we consider the matter aright, we shall see it cannot be otherwise. Natural philosophers tell us that the human understanding in our working moments can never be idle, but must be always thinking of something. So too the heart and will of man can never be without some inclination; they must always have some object to love or hate, to desire or detest. Suppose now that a man or woman, a boy or girl is idly walking, standing, or sitting, with no proper occupation; no study or reflection for the mind, no work for the body: what then goes on in the understanding? for it must have something to think of. Under the circumstances the only thoughts that occupy it are vain, useless, dangerous, or sinful; and from such thoughts can come nothing but vain, useless, dangerous, or sinful affections, inclinations, and desires of the heart. The human heart and mind are like the millstones that turn as long as the water drives the wheel; if the miller puts in wheat, they grind that; if oats, they grind oats; if he puts nothing in they grind each other and make fire and flames. No matter how fertile a field is, says St. Chrysostom, if it is not tilled, and is allowed to lie idle, it can produce nothing but thistles and weeds of all sorts. "In the same way, when the soul has nothing to do," no useful or necessary occupation, "it gives itself up to evil actions." St. Lawrence Justinian employs another simile: Stagnant water that has no movement or outlet becomes foul and miry, and brings

From reason and by diverse similes.

<sup>1</sup> *Licet sabbathis benefacere an male? Anima salvam facere, an perdere?*—Mark iii. 4.

forth only worms and hideous things; clear water, if it is led over a field or garden, brings forth grass and beautiful flowers; but if allowed to run idly over the streets, it gets mixed with the dust and makes mud and dirt. Our hearts and minds are ever-flowing fountains of thoughts and desires; if they are busied with good and praiseworthy work, they must of necessity produce beautiful flowers and excellent fruit; but if they are permitted to run about the streets after vain and sensual objects, nothing can come from them but filth and mire.

In idleness  
the devil  
finds the  
best oppor-  
tunity of  
leading man  
into all  
kinds of sin.

Not without reason is idleness called the devil's pillow.<sup>1</sup> Never does this hateful enemy, who is always on the watch to ensnare our souls, find a better opportunity of spreading abroad his wicked inspirations and temptations, especially in the matter of impurity, than when he finds men idle. Therefore all moralists are agreed that there is no better remedy for evil thoughts and desires than hard work and constant occupation. "Do something," is the advice that St. Jerome once gave a friend of his who complained that he could not defend himself against the evil suggestions and desires of the flesh; "do something, that when the devil comes he may always find you busy;" then he will leave you and say to himself: there is no hearing for me now. And if sometimes you are plagued with those thoughts during your work, act as if they did not concern you, and go on with your work without fear or anxiety; when the devil sees that you pay no attention to him, he will despair of being able to do you any harm and will leave you in peace. You never see birds building their nests in a mill that is always working; they could not bear the constant noise and whirring. But in houses where there is no work-shop nor any noise, the swallows build even in the rooms, if the windows are left open day after day. I have never known a peasant to complain of violent temptations while doing his work in the sweat of his brow, either at home or in the fields. Oh, no! the devil cannot bear the laborious man, but he builds his nest and finds rest with idlers.

Shown by  
examples  
from Scrip-  
ture.

While the Israelites were burdened with hard labor in the Egyptian slavery they never thought of impurity or idolatry. Their circumstances were such that they had no time or inclination for such things. But when they were freed from slavery by the goodness of God, and were idle and unoccupied in the desert; when the bread was sent them miraculously from heaven,

<sup>1</sup> Pulvinar diaboli.

and they knew not how to pass the time except in eating, and drinking, and amusing themselves, "The people sat down to eat, and drink, and they rose up to play,"<sup>1</sup> then they determined to have the golden calf as their god, who led them, as they thought, out of Egypt; then all sorts of excesses took the upper hand. "They have made to themselves a molten calf and have adored it, and sacrificing victims to it have said: These are thy gods, O Israel! that have brought thee out of the land of Egypt."<sup>2</sup> Horrible sins and abominations of the Sodomitites that one may not name, where did you spring from? "Behold, this was the iniquity of Sodom, thy sister," is the answer of the Lord by the prophet Ezechiel. What was it then? "Pride, fulness of bread and abundance, and the idleness of her and of her daughters." What followed therefrom? "And they were lifted up, and committed abominations before Me; and I took them away as thou hast seen."<sup>3</sup> David, unhappy prince! if thou hadst not sat idly at thy window after the midday sleep, thou wouldst never have committed those horrible sins that thou didst afterwards bitterly bewail day and night. Thou wert always holy and pious whilst thou hadst to labor hard to protect thyself against thy enemies and persecutors. Unfortunate Samson! when the Philistines left thee in peace, and thou didst begin to repose in the lap of Dalilah, thou didst lose thy strength and thy eyes and become a laughing-stock to thy enemies! And thou most unhappy Solomon! as long as thou wert busied with the building of the temple thou wert a dear child of God; that wretched peaceful and idle enjoyment of thy goods filled thy heart with the love of women, and turned thee into a shameless idolater. "Idleness hath taught much evil."

But why should I refer to these worn-out histories? We need only consult our daily experience. How much mischief is caused among the poor by idleness? I allude to those beggars who are still young and strong, and well able to earn their bread by honest work, but who, once they get accustomed to idly wandering about the streets, spend the whole day loitering before the houses, and strolling from one town to another; and if you wish to find a

Confirmed by daily experience with regard to mendicants.

<sup>1</sup> Sedit populus manducare et bibere, et surrexerunt ludere.—Exod. xxxii. 6.

<sup>2</sup> Feceruntque sibi vitulum confatilem, et adoraverunt atque immolantes ei hostias dixerunt: isti sunt dii tui Israel, qui te eduxerunt de terra Egypti.—Ibid. 8.

<sup>3</sup> Ecce hæc fuit iniquitas Sodomæ sororis tuæ, superbia, saturitas panis, et abundantia et otium ipsius, et filiarum ejus. Et elevatae sunt, et fecerunt abominationes coram me; et abstuli eas sicut vidisti.—Ezech. xvi. 49, 50.

## 232 *Avoiding Idleness if we Wish to Gain Heaven.*

dissolute, wanton, reckless rabble, ignorant of their religion, you will find many of them among those people. Poor and at the same time most unhappy mortals! I do not wish to injure or to stop the flow of Christian charity, for every alms given for God's sake, no matter who the recipient is, deserves its reward. But I do believe that the best alms for such people, and the most useful for their souls, would be to give them every time they come for charity a gentle but earnest exhortation to avoid idleness, which can never do them any good; for those idlers only steal the bread out of the mouths of other poor people who are really infirm and cannot work, and are a source of loss to the decent poor who have to work hard to feed their children, and yet suffer hunger and hardship. The best alms and those most pleasing to God are given by those ladies and gentlemen who cause poor orphans or vagabond children to be taught some respectable trade, or instruct them in reading, writing, arithmetic, and give them habits of study. In this way those charitable people not only feed the bodies of the poor, but also frequently gain their immortal souls for heaven, by saving them from idleness, and consequently from a vicious life.

And tradesmen and peasants when they have no work.

Let us go in thought into the houses of peasants, into the workshops of tradesmen, to servant men and maids, and laborers, and see what mischief is done them by idleness. What! you exclaim, do you look for idleness among such people? They are never idle. From early morning till late at night they have to work constantly. The peasant labors in the field; the smith at the anvil with his hammer; the shoemaker stitches away with his awl and thread; the joiner and carpenter work at their bench and lathe, and so on for every trade; they are all busy the whole day. Servant men and maids are never left at rest by their masters and mistresses, and so they are not idle. Your objection is indeed not a bad one; what you say is quite true; all these people work hard from one end of the week to the other. But tell me this: if those people ever commit grievous sin by drunkenness, calumny, and detraction, quarreling and fighting, unchaste conversation, impure actions, and dangerous friendships, when do they commit such sins? Is it on week-days, when they are busy with their work? Not at all; they have no time then to think of such things. Now and then an impatient word, a curse uttered unconsciously when the work does not run smoothly—those are almost all the sins they commit then; otherwise one might say

that during the week they lead an innocent, and, if their consciences are pure and they make the good intention, a holy life. When, I ask again, do they commit those grievous sins? Is it not true—and I take those people themselves to witness the truth of this, if there are any of them here present—is it not true that generally and for the most part those sins are committed on Sundays and holy-days, when there is no work to do, or to speak more correctly, when those people wilfully refuse to occupy themselves with the divine service and practices of piety? Then the devil has his chance with them; then the peasant men and women meet; then servant men and maids stand at the door, and often talk and chat about things that should not enter their minds, and see and hear what they should never know anything of; then tradesmen go to the ale-house and indulge in drinking, gambling, quarreling, dissolute conversation, and other amusements of a similar character, and very often the Sunday's revels leave the head in such a state that the Monday following is still worse. With reason therefore did that parish priest say of his people: On week-days my people are pious angels; on Sundays and holy-days there are many of them like demons in their dissolute conduct.

From this I draw the following conclusion: If one Sunday or holy-day in the week can cause so much mischief on account of idleness amongst people who are otherwise good, humble, simple, and well-meaning towards God, so that for months afterwards they labor hard, but gain nothing for heaven because they are in mortal sin: how much evil then will not idleness teach those who make a holy-day of every day in the year, and who lead idle, lazy, luxurious lives? How much mischief can it not teach young men who have nothing to do the whole day but to seek for some means of passing the time! How much evil can it not teach young girls who spend the day before the glass, or looking out of the window to see the passers-by! How much harm can it not do to people of both sexes who, on account of the wealth and prosperity that God has given them, can spend their time doing nothing, and wasting their lives away in idle amusements and follies! How many young students (ah, how I deplore the state of their precious souls!) who bring back with them their baptismal innocence which they have preserved during the scholastic year, only to lose it during the idleness and freedom of the holidays! If one month of the year can do so

What sin  
must not  
then be  
committed  
by those  
who are  
always idle.

much harm, what cannot idleness effect in those for whom the whole year is one holiday? I ask all of you who are here present: When have you most frequently experienced temptations and impure thoughts and desires (I say nothing of your having consented to them, and I hope and trust such has not been the case with any of you); was it not almost always when you were idle and unoccupied, and could afford to stare at everything around you? When you lay in bed longer than usual in the morning? When you gave up work earlier than usual in the evening, and as is unfortunately too often the case in summer, sat at the door still late at night? Or otherwise when you had nothing to occupy you? If one quarter of an hour in the day can do that, what cannot idleness teach those who make a profession of it?

And parents should not wonder at the wickedness of their children, when the latter are brought up in idleness.

Mark this, fathers and mothers; for God has entrusted your children to you, binding you by a grievous obligation to look after their souls and to bring them to heaven. You often complain of the conduct of your sons and daughters; you say that your children already know and speak of things that they should not know anything of for the next twenty years; that from day to day they grow more independent, vain, unruly, indevout, and indeed if you could see into their consciences you would find far worse things that do not appear in their faces. Whence comes this? Eh! reflect a little on the training you give your children; examine how they spend the day from morning till night; see if they do not perhaps sit on that cushion on which the devil takes his rest. You may be quite certain, I repeat with St. Jerome, that idleness is the mother of all concupiscence and sin; you need not have the slightest doubt of this; idleness is the bellows that blows up the flames of impurity and wantonness and all other vices. How is it possible, if the son has nothing to do but eat, drink, sleep, and roam about the streets, if the devil finds him always making a holiday; how is it possible, I say, for that wicked spirit not to lead him into all kinds of sin and evil? How is it possible, if the daughter has no occupation but adorning and tricking herself out; no other teaching or instruction but how she is to make courtesies and pay compliments, how she is to talk and dance; if she is allowed full liberty to attend all kinds of parties; if she finds the smoke of the kitchen too sharp for her eyes; if the spinning-wheel irritates her ears with its noise; if the needle hurts her hands; if the smoothing-iron is too hard

for her hands, if the gaufering-iron blisters her fingers; if house-work is too hard or too low for her; if her whole occupation consists in talking, joking, laughing, sitting at the window or before the door; how is it possible that in such circumstances innocence, piety, modesty, purity should escape getting into danger and being lost? There is not the least doubt that idleness is the sole root of all this mischief.

Do not allow idleness into the house; keep the children working diligently, and then things will go better. And do not let the piety of your daughters deceive you in this particular; they may wish to spend the whole morning in the church, and to be present at vespers and other devotions in the afternoon. I do not say that those things are not good, but they are not always real devotions with every one; sometimes they are prompted by a spirit of freedom, weariness of being alone, love of idleness, curiosity, the desire to see and be seen. The best and safest prayer for Christian maidens on week-days is, after having heard holy Mass, to work diligently at home for the honor of God. There is no better inheritance you can leave your children, no more useful dowry for their future wedding-day, than, besides the fear of God, a love and relish for suitable work. This is the best means of preserving their temporal goods and saving their souls from sins and vice. Fathers, mothers, see that you give your children good example in this respect!

What, some of you will say, do you wish to make us all work? You must know that we do not need to earn our bread in that way; we have, thank God! enough to live on; we belong to rich, respectable families, and it would not be becoming in us to toil and work; we have servants to do that for us. Now I am indeed glad to hear that you are rich and noble. I wish you joy, and hope that it may last! But that does not excuse you from honorable work and occupation; that is no reason why you should be always idle. The good of a serious occupation is not merely earning one's livelihood; the chief reason is to avoid opening the door to sin and vice by idleness, so that we may save our souls. Consider that house which the Holy Ghost describes to us in the Book of Proverbs. In it there was an abundance of all good things, and it was as well provided as the ship that does not leave the land until it is filled with all necessities; its numerous servants were all well fed, clothed, and provided for. The master sat in the council and took his place among the senators

But should encourage them to work at some suitable labor.

Although they may not be obliged to work to support themselves.

of the land; the mistress was clothed in rich apparel; in a word, everything was in such good order that there was nothing which one could envy in another house. In the midst of these riches, what did the mistress do in the house? Did she occupy herself, as she might have done, in going to parties, walking, gambling, and visiting? Hear the words of the Holy Ghost: "She hath sought wool and flax, and hath wrought by the counsel of her hands;" mark this, Christian women and maidens! "She is like the merchant's ship, she bringeth her bread from afar." So diligent was she in her housework that she even interrupted her night's rest: "She hath risen in the night, and given a prey to her household, and victuals to her maidens. She hath put out her hand to strong things, and her fingers have taken hold of the spindle." In a word: "She...hath not eaten her bread idle." Was that amount of labor necessary for such a woman? By no means, but she occupied herself thus in order to please God. Therefore she merited the name of a God-fearing woman: "The woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised. Give her of the fruit of her hands, and let her works praise her in the gates."<sup>1</sup> Those holy hermits of olden times who lived on herbs and roots, and wove baskets the whole day, did not do so for the sake of earning their living or making money, for when a basket was finished they would unweave it and commence it again; their only object was to avoid idleness and always to have something to do, some work in hand. A few years ago I saw in a princely court the princess with countesses and other noble ladies continually at work, even while taking their tea; some were sewing, others embroidering, and others making lace. To my great amazement I read lately of Charlemagne, the great Christian emperor, that he had his sons taught different trades and professions, while his daughters had to spin and were not allowed to wear any linen or lace but what they had made themselves. What do you think of this? These people belonged to a princely, an imperial family; and they worked, not for their daily bread, but for the sake of their souls, and of Christian modesty and humility.

<sup>1</sup> Quæsit lanam et lînum, et operata est consilio manuum suarum. Facta est quasi navis institoris, de longe portans panem suum. De nocte surrexit, deditque prædam domesticis suis, et cibaria ancillis suis. Manum suam misit ad fortia, et digiti ejus apprehenderunt fusum. Panem otiosa non comedit. Mulier timens Dominum, ipsa laudabitur. Date ei de fructu manuum suarum, et laudent eam in portis opera ejus.—Prov. xxxi. 13-15, 19, 27, 30, 31.



You do not need to work, you say, in order to earn your bread. Very good, but you must work to earn heaven; is not that so? Even if an idle life brought no sin or vice in its train, no special temptations, it still could not lead to heaven. For what is eternal happiness, and to whom is it promised? It is a reward that is given to every one according to his works. "The Son of man shall come in the glory of His Father with His angels," so says Our Lord in the Gospel of St. Matthew, "and then will He render to every man according to his works."<sup>1</sup> Heaven is a penny that will not be given to any one unless to him who has labored till evening. "And when evening was come, the lord of the vineyard saith to his steward: Call the laborers and pay them their hire;" and then "they received every man a penny."<sup>2</sup> Therefore the usual excuse is of no avail: if I do nothing, I do no harm. What! no harm? To do nothing is in itself harmful. You have a piece of land which is so hard that it produces no thistles or thorns, or other weeds, but neither does it produce good fruit; is that good land? No. It is worth nothing to you. The heavenly Householder will one day ask us the question that was put to the idlers in the Gospel: "Why stand you here all the day idle?"<sup>3</sup> He will not say: why stand you here, wicked and unjust people? Why do you hinder others from working? Why do you destroy My vineyard? But: "Why stand you here all the day idle?" "Go you also into My vineyard;"<sup>4</sup> work, or you have no reward to expect. No, I repeat with St. Augustine, never will any one who loves idleness become a citizen of heaven.

My dear brethren, do we not all wish to go to heaven? Then let us work honestly for it. If the state to which each one is called by Divine Providence does not allow him to occupy himself always with holy things and virtuous works, then at least let him see that the devil never finds him idle, and that the precious time that is given us only that we may gain heaven is not uselessly squandered. Christian tradesmen, and all who must earn your living by honest labor, oh, how fortunate you are in this respect, if you keep from grievous sin and always direct

For we must labor to gain heaven.

Consolation for those who have to work, and exhortation always to make a good use of time.

<sup>1</sup> Filius enim hominis venturus est in gloria Patris sui, cum angelis suis; et tunc reddet unicuique secundum opera ejus.—Matt. xvi. 27.

<sup>2</sup> Cum sero autem factum esset, dicit dominus vineæ procuratori suo: voca operarios, et redde illis mercedem: et acceperunt singulos denarios.—Ibid. xx. 8, 9.

<sup>3</sup> Quid hic statis tota die otiosi?—Ibid. 6.

<sup>4</sup> Ite et vos in vineam meam.—Ibid. 7.

your work to God by the good intention! Never regret the sweat that bathes your brows. Think often: ah, surely heaven is worth any labor! St. Macarius went once to visit St. Anthony; as soon as these holy old hermits had greeted each other, they sat down and began to speak of heavenly things. Macarius, although he was tired from the journey, took up the pieces of bark that were near him and began as usual to make baskets, that he might not be idle; thus while the tongue was speaking of God the hands were working the whole time in the divine honor. When Macarius was about to depart, Anthony fell on his neck, and pressing both his hands warmly, broke out into the following exclamation: "O holy and blessed hands! what glory you shall have!" For you would not remain a moment idle, even after a long journey and during a holy conversation. Christian workmen! not Anthony, but Christ Himself will one day say to you in congratulation when the evening of life puts an end to your toil: O blessed hands which worked the whole day for My sake, what glory you have earned! Blessed souls, who early in the morning, while others were squandering away their precious time in sleep, went to church, to devotions, in spite of cold, snow, rain, wind, and weather, and offered your daily labor to Me in public hymns and prayers, while during the day you often renewed that intention by holy thoughts and aspirations, saying: "For Thy sake, O Lord!" Now I do not say to you: Go into My vineyard to work; but to your eternal consolation: "Come, ye blessed of My Father," whom you have so truly served. Come into the kingdom and receive your reward, the penny you have earned with Me and all My servants; enter into eternal joys! Oh, what a happiness for him who hears those words! Let us work diligently for God's honor and we shall hear them. Amen.

*Another introduction to the same sermon for Septuagesima Sunday.*

#### Text.

*Quid hic statis tota die otiosi?*—Matt. xx. 6.  
 "Why stand you here all the day idle?"

#### Introduction.

And who could blame the poor people for standing in the market-place idle, if they could find no work? Who were they

whom the householder reproved so sharply? They were laborers who were accustomed to work from their youth upwards, and they had come to the market that they might be seen and thus perhaps have a chance of being hired by some one; therefore they said: "No man hath hired us," although we have been waiting here the whole day. What would the householder have said to them if they were lazy good-for-nothings, who seldom did any work, and had come to the market merely for the purpose of talking and chatting, and passing away the time? What would he have said if they had spent in that manner not only a day, but whole weeks and months, roaming about the streets, and making a profession of idleness through dislike for work? My dear brethren, how many idlers of the kind are there not nowadays among Christians, to whom the heavenly Householder might say with just indignation: "Why stand you here all the day idle?" Nay, why do you idle away the greater part of your lives? Do these people also expect to receive the penny, that is, an eternal kingdom, as their reward in the evening, at the end of their lives? Ah, that cannot be! The reward is promised, not to idlers, but to those who work hard, as I shall now show, and I say: *Plan of Discourse as above.*

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### FIFTY-SEVENTH SERMON.

#### ON THE VANITY OF THE HOPE OF HEAVEN IN THOSE WHO DO NOT KEEP THE COMMANDMENTS OF GOD.

##### Subject.

1. Many men desire and hope to go to heaven, but they do not keep the commandments of God; 2. A still greater number desire and hope to go to heaven, but they do not keep all the commandments of God, or else they do not keep them constantly. In both cases the hope is a delusive one.—*Preached on Pentecost Sunday.*

##### Text.

*Si quis diligit me, sermonem meum servabit.*—John xiv. 23.

"If any one love Me, he will keep My word."

##### Introduction.

This is the real proof of the genuineness of the love we bear

to God; it is the only way in which we can show that love, namely, by keeping God's word, that is, His commandments. This is the sole foundation of our hopes of heaven, the keeping the commandments. Vainly should I hope for salvation, relying on the goodness and mercy of God, if I do not keep His commandments inviolably, as I showed on the last occasion. Vainly should I hope and desire salvation, relying on anything else, no matter what it is, if I do not keep the commandments, and indeed all of them. And yet what a number of people there are in the world who delude themselves with that false hope! as I shall now prove by way of paternal admonition to them, and of exhortation to all to persevere in the service of God.

### Plan of Discourse.

*Many men desire and hope to go to heaven, but they do not keep the commandments of God. This is a false and deceitful hope; as we shall see in the first part. A still greater number desire and hope to go to heaven, but they do not keep all the commandments, or do not keep them constantly. Also a false and deceitful hope; as we shall see in the second part.*

O Holy Ghost! do Thou enlighten us and move us all by Thy light and grace, that we may act more reasonably and make our salvation more certain, by building our hopes of it on the faithful observance of all Thy commandments. This we ask of Thee through the intercession of Thy virginal spouse, Mary, and of our holy guardian angels.

To gain  
heaven it is  
not enough  
to desire it.

If nothing more were required to gain heaven but the mere wish and hope, oh, then indeed would all men be saved, and the terrible saying, "few are chosen," which causes such fear and anxiety, might be erased from the Sacred Scripture! O sinners! no matter how wicked and godless you are; blasphemers, profane swearers, adulterers, detractors, unjust, unchaste men, murderers, drunkards, and all the rest of you from whom St. Paul has taken away all hope of heaven, then indeed might you be of good heart, for heaven would be yours. For there is no one among you so blind and so perverse, if he has a little spark of faith and reason left, as not to feel pleasure at the thought of being saved eternally. There is no one so hardened in guilt as not to be terrified at the thought of the everlasting fire of hell; no one so forgetful of his own welfare as not to wish to go to heaven; no one

so despairing as not to desire to escape hell. Is that not the case? But wishing and desiring alone will not do here.

To enter a town it is not enough to look at it from a distance, and to send forward your desires in its direction; you must stir yourself and move forward. Are you hungry? Then it is not enough for you to wish to see the table laid and to eat; you must sit down and take the food prepared for you. The peasant would have to wait a long time for his harvest if he trusted merely to his wishes and desires; he must put his hands to the work, and plough and sow his field. In these and similar parables does Our Lord represent heaven to us. Heaven is a city that comes to no one of itself. We read in Holy Writ that it once descended to one man, the holy Evangelist St. John: "I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem," he writes in the Apocalypse, "coming down out of heaven." But where did he see that? The angel "took me up in spirit to a great and high mountain."<sup>1</sup> Why not on the level plain, which would have been a much more convenient place for the aged and decrepit apostle? No; he as well as all other men must climb up thither with great toil and exertion: the way to it is rough and narrow, the gate small and low, and one has to force his way through it by violence, as it were. "Strive to enter by the narrow gate."<sup>2</sup> Heaven is a great banquet. "A certain man made a great supper and invited many;"<sup>3</sup> but they who excused themselves on account of other occupations, and did not wish to come, were excluded and had no share in the banquet. Heaven is a field, a vineyard to which laborers are sent at different hours; but they must work therein till the evening, and bear the heat of the day. Heaven is a treasure buried deep in the earth, and one that requires hard work to dig out: "Thou shalt seek her as money," says the Holy Ghost of the true wisdom required to work out our salvation, "and shalt dig for her as for a treasure;"<sup>4</sup> otherwise you will not find her. Heaven is a precious stone for the purchase of which one should give up all he has, and if so unfortunate as to lose it, he should give himself no rest until he has found it again. Heaven is a prize for which we must run and compete. "So run that you may obtain,"<sup>5</sup> such is the exhortation given us by St.

We must also work for it, keeping the commandments. Shown by similes from Scripture.

<sup>1</sup> Vidi civitatem sanctam Jerusalem novam descendentem de cœlo. Sustulit me in spiritu in montem magnum et altum.—Apoc. xxi. 2, 10.

<sup>2</sup> Contendite intrare per angustam portam.—Luke xlii. 24.

<sup>3</sup> Homo quidam fecit cœnam magnam, et vocavit multos.—Ibid. xiv. 16.

<sup>4</sup> Si quasiëris eam quasi pecuniam, et sicut thesauros effoderis illam.—Prov. ii. 4.

<sup>5</sup> Sic currite, ut comprehendatis.—I. Cor. ix. 24.

Paul. Heaven is a great gain that we must work for with constant diligence: "Trade till I come."<sup>1</sup> Heaven is a crown that will not be given to any one who has not fought long enough for it: "He also that striveth for the mastery is not crowned except he strive lawfully."<sup>2</sup> Heaven is the promised land flowing with milk and honey, and to possess it we must go out of Egypt, and wander through the desert; that is, we must detach our hearts from the world and the love of the world, deny ourselves, and bear steadfastly the cross laid on us. Heaven is a kingdom in which an infinite God makes the happiness of His elect, but it must be stormed and taken by violence: "From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent bear it away."<sup>3</sup> In a word: "If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments;"<sup>4</sup> and these words are said to all men.

Now there  
are plenty  
who hope  
and wish  
for heaven,  
but they do  
not work  
for it.

Meanwhile, my dear brethren, are there not multitudes of men who content themselves with mere hopes and desires, without putting their hands to work, or moving one foot before the other to get to heaven? I trust I shall get to heaven. I will and must save my soul. God forbid that I should be lost forever; it would be better for me never to have been born! No; the salvation of my soul is the chief thing, on which everything depends. Ah, God grant that I may die a happy death! Oh, what a great good heaven is! Would that I were there! Such are the thoughts, the professions, the desires, the words of most, nay, nearly all Christians. Therefore I will strive earnestly for heaven; I will direct all my cares and occupations to that one end; I will keep exactly all the commandments of God, avoid carefully all sin and the dangers of sin, restrain the wicked passions and desires that have so often led me into sin, and diligently perform the duties of my state; therefore I will serve God zealously, candidly confess and repent of my sins, and frequently make use of the spiritual helps provided for me, hear the word of God, and often receive the sacraments; and I shall commence this very day to live in that manner, and not wait till to-morrow. Such should be our thoughts, words, and actions; but not all think and speak like that, and very few act in that way.

<sup>1</sup> *Negotiamini dum venio.*—Luke xix. 13.

<sup>2</sup> *Qui certat in agone, non coronatur, nisi legitime certaverit.*—II. Tim. ii. 5.

<sup>3</sup> *A diebus Joannis Baptistæ usque nunc regnum cælorum vim patitur, et violenti rapiunt illud.*—Matt. xi. 12.

<sup>4</sup> *Si autem vis ad vitam ingredi, serva mandata.*—Ibid. xix. 17.

All parents say: I wish to go to heaven; but how many of them are careless, unchristian, reckless in the training of their children? How little they think of instructing their children in virtue? how carefully they train them to vanity? And yet this is one of the chief things that hinders them from saving their souls. I will go to heaven, say the children; but where is their obedience, and the reverence and love they owe their parents? I will go to heaven, say masters and mistresses; but what care do they take of the souls of their servants and others under their authority? I will go to heaven, say servants; but where is the fidelity and honesty they owe their masters? I will go to heaven, say superiors and persons in authority; but where are their justice, their Christian charity, their endeavors to further the glory of God? I will go to heaven, say merchants and shopkeepers; but where is their honesty in business, the care they should take of their spiritual welfare? I will go to heaven, say the rich; but where is their Christian humility, their charity and generosity towards the poor and needy? I will go to heaven, say the afflicted and oppressed; but where is their patience under adversity, their perfect resignation to the will of God? I will go to heaven, say the aged; but where is the edifying life they should lead conformably to their state? I will go to heaven, say the young; but where is their modesty, reserve, careful avoidance of sin and the occasions of sin, purity of heart and soul, and the constant mortification of the senses? Of these latter things little is thought, and still less are they put into practice. Thus we wish to enter into the beautiful city of heaven, but do not wish to tread the narrow way that leads there; we wish to receive the crown of glory, but not to take up the arms with which we should fight for it; we sigh for the promised land, and still remain among the onions and garlic of Egypt. These are the tepid Christians of whom the Holy Ghost says: "The slug-gard willeth, and willeth not."<sup>1</sup> He wishes the end, but will not use the means of gaining it; he desires the salvation of his soul, but will not do anything to secure it.

"Good master," said the young man to Our Lord, as we read in the Gospel of St. Matthew, "what good shall I do that I may have life everlasting?" I know well and see that the world is not for me, and that I am not for the world; for sooner or later I must leave it and go hence; what does it cost to win heaven?

And this is the case with most people.

They wish for heaven and do not wish for it, at the same time.

<sup>1</sup> Vult et non vult piger.—Prov. xiii. 4.

The plain answer that Our Lord gave to this question consisted in the words: "If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments."<sup>1</sup> The first and most necessary condition is: "if thou wilt." Do you really wish it? Are you fully in earnest about it? He does not say: if thou wouldst wish; but if thou wilt. Oh, what a heap of false desires, wishes, and intentions of going to heaven we have in our hearts, that are called by theologians mere velleities! for we do not say: I will; I am fully determined, earnestly resolved; but I would wish; I should like. These velleities are nothing else but half acts of the will, slight and weak movements of the heart, fruitless and empty desires, sickly and vacillating resolutions, vain, natural longings which we have for all that is represented to us as good, pleasing, becoming, and useful. Lame and weak desires of the kind are common even with the greatest and most hardened sinners; for they well know what sin is: how detestable, dangerous, and injurious it is, and they would wish to be freed from it; they are also aware of the beauty of virtue, and would willingly practise it; they would like to be pious, God-fearing, devout, chaste, and innocent; but even while they wish to turn from evil and lead good lives they go on in the old way and make no change.

Shown by  
a simile.

St. Augustine gives us a vigorous sketch drawn from his own experience of this apparent or half will in his meditation on the words of the Prophet David: "As the dream of them that awake, O Lord! so in Thy city Thou shalt bring their image to nothing."<sup>2</sup> Thus the saint compares the lives of such people to the dream of a man who is just wakening and on the point of getting up out of bed. When one awakens or is aroused in the morning he knows that it is time to finish his sleep and to get up; but overcome by drowsiness he lies on still, and remains where he is; he opens his eyes and sees the sun shining through the window, but his head is still heavy and he allows it to sink on his breast, closes his eyes, and goes on as before. Bye-and-bye he raises his head again from the pillow, but it is still heavy as lead, and he lets it fall down again. That man does not wish to sleep any longer, and yet he sleeps; he wants to get up, and still remains in bed because his will is not earnest in the matter. So it is in reality with the weak desire to go to heaven. "The sluggard willeth,

<sup>1</sup> Magister bone, quid boni faciam ut habeam vitam æternam? Si vis ad vitam ingredi, serva mandata.—Matt. xix. 16, 17.

<sup>2</sup> Velut somnium surgentium, Domine, in civitate tua imaginem ipsorum ad nihilum rediges.—Ps. lxxii. 20.



and willeth not." That man wishes to save his soul, and at the same time does not wish, because he does not use the necessary means.

Nay, people often do quite the contrary; they run at top speed where there is no hope of salvation; they travel on the road the end of which is eternal ruin. If the Son of God had come down from heaven to announce to us a law of idleness, vanity, comfort-seeking, pleasure, dissolute living—if He had given us the days, weeks, months, years of our lives only to be spent in useless things, so that a part of them was to be devoted to sleep, another part to dressing and tricking ourselves out in vain apparel, a third to eating and drinking, a fourth to useless conversation and idle company, a fifth to gambling and other amusements, and we should pass our time in that way; if moreover He had not required of us any good works, or acts of Christian devotion, or recollection of eternity, or examen of conscience, or the reading of spiritual books, or the hearing of sermons, or alms-giving, fasting, or penance in order to gain heaven; if we were bound by the Gospel of Christ so restore the old abuses of heathenism, and publicly to practise them; if Christ had caused the images of false gods and demons to be removed from the altars, out of the churches, only so that He Himself might pose as the Protector and Defender of pride, avarice, injustice, intemperance, impurity; if, I say, God had promised His heaven only to those who pass their lives in those vices, could any other kind of life be required then but that which, as we know, is led by most people in the world, even by those who boast that they are Christians, although the Gospel of Christ teaches us quite the contrary? Is not this the mode of life of many vain men of the world who hardly recognize any other God but themselves and their bodies? Is not this the course followed by so many of both sexes who think of nothing but amusing themselves? Is it not the life of those voluptuaries whose only care is to gratify their senses? Is it not the life of so many tepid Christians, who know nothing of any pious practices beyond hearing Mass on Sundays and holy-days, abstaining from flesh-meat on forbidden days, if they do even that much, and going to confession and holy Communion at Easter? Is it not the life of so many libertines, whose luxurious habits lead them into all sorts of sin and wickedness?

Nay, very many do quite the contrary, and work to be shut out from heaven.

And yet all these people hope and desire to go to heaven. Ask Thus the

hope of all  
these people  
is delusive.

them if they would not be glad to save their souls, if they have any intention and hope of doing that; there is no doubt, they will answer: we must go to heaven; we must save our souls. But you may wish and desire a long time before you save them in that way. Otherwise the good and pious would be badly off, and would have just reason for complaint, seeing that they must work so hard for the reward that the others carry off so easily and comfortably. No, that will not do; your wish is a mere empty desire that exists only in the imagination; it is not a firm, earnest determination of the will. Hell is full of souls that have wished to be eternally happy; not one of them wanted to be damned, but they did not wish earnestly; they were disposed in the matter just as you are. He who desires to attain the end must use the means necessary thereto. "If any one love Me he will keep My word." He who desires to gain heaven must keep the commandments of God, otherwise his hope is a false and deceitful one. And he must keep all the commandments, and that constantly, otherwise his hope is again deceitful and false; and yet it is entertained by most men, as we shall see in the

### Second Part.

Others in  
order to get  
to heaven  
keep some  
of the com-  
mand-  
ments, but  
not all.

Our holy Founder, St. Ignatius, in his celebrated Book of the Spiritual Exercises, compares those who keep some but not all the commandments to those sick people who wish to get well, and to that end take the medicines that please their taste, but reject those that are prescribed by the doctors because they are too bitter or insipid, although the latter are far better for them. Who could believe that those people are in earnest about wishing for health? Consider now the will and the hope that we flatter ourselves we have of going to heaven; is it not of that kind in most cases? It is rare to find even among the most perverse one who is resolved to break all the commandments; seldom do you find a man who is not disgusted with some vice or other, or who does not find pleasure in an inclination for some virtue, or who does not endeavor to practise some work of devotion. We see, thanks be to God, many Christians who interrupt their temporal duties almost daily to hear holy Mass, and who attend sermons on Sundays and holy-days, and go frequently in the month to confession and holy Communion. Such is the case, my dear brethren. But what are we to conclude from this? That all those people are earnestly desirous of getting to heaven? Ah, I am afraid the

contrary is the case; they do not wish, and they will not go to heaven. Why? Because they wish only in part; they consult their own caprices in the choice of the means they use, while they reject others that do not jump with their inclination and humor, although the latter are necessary and useful to their salvation.

Preach to some, for instance, about mortification, fasting, abstinence from forbidden food, moderation in drinking—oh, in those things they find no difficulty; they think and say with the young man in the Gospel, whom Christ exhorted to keep the commandments: "All these things I have observed from my youth." Thank God! I am no drunkard or reveller; I keep the fast days prescribed by the Church as a Catholic Christian should keep them. And so they go home from the sermon comforted, with a sure pledge of their eternal salvation. But preach to them about abstaining from forbidden carnal pleasures, about guarding the eyes and other senses so as not to wound purity by look or thought, and what happens? Even what happened with that young man when Our Lord said to him: "Go, sell whatsoever thou hast and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven, and come, follow Me." At these words he went away sad, without making answer; "Who being struck sad at that saying, went away sorrowful."<sup>1</sup> That did not suit him. If I say to a man: he who wishes to go to heaven must lead a chaste life, he is pleased with that, because he is not inclined to the vice of impurity, or lives happy in the married state; "all these things I have observed," he will answer. But if I add: he who wishes to go to heaven must make restitution of ill-gotten goods and give them back to their lawful owner, even to the last farthing, and if he has any doubt about his lawful claim to anything in his possession he must carefully set to work to solve the doubt as soon as possible, then he goes away sad; that does not suit him. The third thinks: so far I am all right; I do not remember having injured anyone in my whole life; "all these things I have observed;" but if I say to him: he who wishes to go to heaven must lay aside hatred and ill-will, and live in peace with his neighbor, and forgive his enemy from his heart, that does not please him at all; he goes away sad. A fourth thinks: that is not for me; I have not an enemy on the face of the earth,

They keep those that suit their inclinations.

<sup>1</sup> *Hæc omnia observavi a juventute mea. Vade, quæcunque habes, vende, et da pauperibus, et habebis thesaurum in coelo, et veni, sequere me. Qui contristatus in verbo, abiit moerens*—Mark x. 20—22.

and I wish well to every one as I do to myself; "all these things I have observed." But if I say: you must also give up that intimacy, that company and occasion which is the radical cause of so many sins to you; you must renounce that vanity and love of dress that is a cause of scandal to others, and leads them into sin, then he goes away sad. A fifth thinks: this is not for me; "all these things I have observed." But if I say: you must from day to day earnestly try to lessen and altogether give up your habit of cursing and swearing, then he shrugs his shoulders, and goes away sad. The sixth thinks: "all these things I have observed;" I do not curse or swear. But you must keep your unruly tongue in check, and give up that habit of fault-finding, abusing, and talking uncharitably of others and injuring their reputation, thus sinning against charity; that is not at all to his taste; he goes away sad. In a word, if piety and wickedness, virtue and vice, innocence and devotion, and guilt and transgression, the law of the Gospel of Christ and the laws and customs of the vain world, could be all mixed up and united together, then most people would have no difficulty, and would find courage and strength enough to tread the path to heaven.

But this is not enough; all the commandments without one exception must be kept.

But you have to know that it is with the Christian life as with faith. If I refuse to believe a single article of faith I am an unbeliever; if I fail to observe one point of the law I am wicked and deserve hell-fire. "Whosoever shall keep the whole law, but offend in one point, is become guilty of all."<sup>1</sup> It is not enough to keep one or several points of the commandments, to fulfil one or several of our Christian duties; they must all be fulfilled. When you are on a journey, does it help you to have three good and sound wheels on your carriage if the fourth is broken so that you cannot proceed? What does it avail your health to be free from fever if consumption chains you to your bed? What difference does it make to your life to be pierced with a sword or shot with a bullet? In the same way, how could it help your salvation to go with one foot towards heaven and with the other towards hell? You say: I am not a thief or an unjust man; that is all right; robbery and injustice will not keep you out of heaven; but you are puffed up and proud on account of your wealth, and you despise others, so that it is your pride that will send you to hell. You are not guilty of adultery

<sup>1</sup> Quicumque totam legem servaverit offendat autem in uno, factus est omnium reus.—James ii. 10.

or incest; that is right; but you are impure in your thoughts and desires; you are a cause of sin to others by your extravagance in dress, by your caresses and allurements; it is this latter vice and not the former that will condemn you. You are meek, charitable, merciful; a beautiful virtue! but you are addicted to an idle, comfort-seeking, and intemperate mode of life; the cause of your damnation will not be vindictiveness, harshness, or cruelty, but your intemperance and sloth in the divine service. You are not one of those who seek quarrels, and foment discord and disunion; but you are apt to rash-judge and speak ill of your neighbor. It is not a revengeful spirit, but rash-judging and an unbridled tongue that will be the cause of your ruin. You are not a public, notorious, scandalous, and abandoned sinner; but you are addicted to a secret sin known to yourself alone, and that will be reason enough for God to reject you. No matter what good works you perform, as long as you do not renounce all vices, you are, as Tertullian says, only half a Christian; you are divided between God and the devil; you have only half a wish to go to heaven. God does not allow that; He must have all or nothing. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole mind."<sup>1</sup> Such is the command given to us. We are not told to love Him with half of our heart, soul, or mind, but with our whole heart, etc. He who does not give himself altogether to God, and keeps back something for himself, acts against God: "He that is not with Me is against Me."<sup>2</sup>

Nay, I might almost say that although every sin is an abomination in the sight of God, yet it would be better for many a one and more advantageous to his salvation, to be altogether and evidently vicious than to be as we have described, and only half devout. Why? Because a great and wicked sinner has a clearer perception of his unhappy and miserable state, and is more likely to free himself from it by sincere repentance and amendment through the fear of hell, while the half-Christian, since he is not conscious of grievous or very enormous sins, and actually does some apparently good works every day, flatters himself that his devotion is all right, and lives assured of salvation without fear or anxiety, nor does he find out his mistake until he has actually entered on an unhappy eternity. It was the pub-

Nay, they have less hope of heaven than if they were altogether wicked.

<sup>1</sup> Diliges Dominum Deum tuum ex tota corde tuo, et in tota anima tua, et in tota mente tua.—Matt. xxii. 37.

<sup>2</sup> Qui non est mecum contra me est.—Ibid. xii. 30.

lic sinner who stood humbly at the door of the temple, and, striking his breast, with contrite heart acknowledged his guilt: "O God! be merciful to me a sinner."<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, the Pharisee boasted of his fasting, alms-giving, and other works, and thought he was a saint; but, according to the testimony of Our Lord, it was not he, but the publican who went home justified. And this is the meaning of the divine words of the Apocalypse: "I would thou wert cold, or hot: but because thou art lukewarm," half fish, half flesh, belonging half to Me and half to the devil, "... I will begin to vomit thee out of My mouth."<sup>2</sup> One cannot gain heaven with those cold-hearted wishes and empty desires.

Others keep  
the com-  
mandments,  
but not  
constantly.  
Shown by a  
simile.

And if there is a great number of men who, through the desire of going to heaven, resolve to employ the proper means without excepting any of them, yet even amongst those the greater number have a very weak will and resolution, so that they are easily overcome by the least difficulty, and all their intentions come to nothing. The prophet Osee compares those people to birds, when he says of Ephraim: "As for Ephraim, their glory hath flown away like a bird."<sup>3</sup> Have you ever seen a heap of corn in an open barn during harvest time? How gladly the birds come and fly around it, and how eagerly they feed on it! But go and merely clap your hands together, or pick up a stone from the ground, nay, simply put a straw man at the door with a few rags about him, so that the wind can blow him about, and the birds fly away at once. Silly things! why do you leave the good food? Has any one beaten you? No. There was only a noise made with the hand, or the shadow of a man, or the rustling of a rag of cloth. But why should we wonder at this, my dear brethren? They are only birds that have not reason. Let us rather be surprised at ourselves; for we often seem to fly up in desires and longings to heaven that stands open before us, but like the birds we fly off at the least shadow of difficulty, and forget all our good resolutions. "Their glory hath flown away like a bird."

There have  
been men  
of that kind  
before now.

Pilate was a bird of that kind. How anxious he was to save Christ from death! He was well aware of the innocence of Our Lord, and, in spite of the shouts and clamors of the ferocious

<sup>1</sup> Deus propitius esto mihi peccatori.—Luke xviii. 13.

<sup>2</sup> Utinam frigidus esses, aut calidus; sed quia tepidus es... incipiam te vomere ex ore meo.—Apoc. iii. 15, 16.

<sup>3</sup> Ephraim quia quasi avis avolavit.—Osee ix. 11.

rabble, he protested openly that he could find no proof of guilt in Him. He tried everything to acquit Him and let Him go free; and yet a mere breath of wind, the mere mention of the emperor's name, whose friendship he feared to lose, was enough to cause him to change his mind. Against his conscience and better knowledge "he delivered Jesus up to their will."<sup>1</sup> Herod was a bird of that kind; as the Scripture says, he had a great esteem for St. John the Baptist; he was disgusted at the cruel request for his head; a hundred times he cursed in his own mind the oath he had taken, and his only wish was to save John's life; but what sort of a resolution could you expect from such an effeminate king? As soon as Herodias began to speak he was no longer master of himself; he granted everything she asked for, although against his will: "He sent, and beheaded John in the prison."<sup>2</sup>

Most Christians are inconstant, timorous birds of that kind in the affair of their eternal salvation. If a man's sleeping faith begins to awake; if he is enlightened by a ray of inward grace; if his conscience is moved by hearing the word of God, oh, what salutary movements he experiences in his heart! what sighs and desires for heaven are sent forth by his will! what beautiful resolutions he makes! He condemns his former wicked, slothful, lazy life; now all shall be changed for the better; he will always think of his soul and its salvation; he will turn earnestly to God and occupy himself with and care for nothing but heaven; he will begin to live as a good Christian should; he will avoid all sin, and strive for virtue with all his strength. What a rapid flight he takes towards heaven! How quickly, too, that woman changes! She resolves to lead a more Christian life, to make a better use of her time, to receive the sacraments more frequently, to be more regular in appearing at public devotions, to work for a future life more diligently, and to give for her salvation what she hitherto for such a long time squandered on vanity and luxury, on idleness, and on dangerous parties and company. Eh! what a beautiful and eager flight towards heaven! But what is required to interrupt this flight, to turn the bird back again? Nothing more than the name of an emperor, human respect, a threat, or a promise; nothing more than the dancing girl, a bad example, dangerous company, an alluring demeanor, a

And there  
are many  
now  
amongst  
Christians.

<sup>1</sup> *Jesum tradidit voluntati eorum.*—Luke xxiii. 25.

<sup>2</sup> *Misitque, et decollavit Joannem in carcere.*—Matt. xiv. 10.

word of flattery, an attraction in the least occasion that offers, and there is an end to all the good resolutions, because they are weak, and the former mode of life is resumed. Meanwhile the years of their lives pass away, and they have nothing better than those changeable desires and weak resolutions, those daily purposes and intentions of doing everything, although in reality nothing whatever is done.

**Examen** to  
see if we  
have not  
been of  
their num-  
ber hitherto.

Now, my dear brethren, let each one of you ask himself by way of conclusion: have I hitherto wished to go to heaven? Do I still wish it? Have I wished it earnestly and in truth? Am I determined to carry this into effect? What have I hitherto done to this end? What am I doing now? Have I not perhaps been content with mere desires and empty longings, not using the proper means of fulfilling them? But how can such wishes or desires help me? Of what good is this weak determination of mine? Do you wish to do me a service? is a question often asked in the world; then show that you are in earnest by doing it. The ordinary compliments that people make through politeness, offering their services, do not count for much; they are empty words that one cannot depend on. If I wish to go to heaven I must show that my wish is real by keeping the commandments of God, by zeal in the practice of virtue, and indeed by keeping all the commandments, not one excepted; by fulfilling all the obligations of my state and condition, not one excepted, and by diligence and constancy in the practice of virtue. Do I do as much for heaven as I am wont to do for health's sake, or to make some temporal profit? to secure success in my domestic affairs? to get a good situation? to please a mere mortal? to satisfy my senses and love of comfort? Nay, do I do as much for the sake of gaining heaven as I have often done to commit sin? to avenge myself on my enemy? to enjoy the forbidden love of a creature? to get possession unjustly of another's property? to lose my soul for all eternity? How many thoughts, considerations, cares, labors, journeys! how much running here and there, chagrin, and expense I have endured to gain those ends! And shall I now refuse to take the least trouble, to make the slightest effort to gain an indescribable, eternal good in heaven? To accomplish my will in those other things, I was not satisfied with using one or the other means; I did everything that lay in my power; I ventured on everything that offered the slightest chance of success; and to get to heaven shall I only do a little, and not all that



is necessary? To gain those objects no watching, fasting, expense in money, begging, humbling myself seemed too much for me; nay, they were easy and pleasing; and even those very means seem difficult to me now and intolerable, and not to be endured, when there is question of using them to gain eternal happiness. What a shameful and degrading weakness!

Ah, my dear brethren, do we wish to go to heaven? If so, why do we take such little trouble about it? Do we not wish to go to heaven? What have we to seek or desire in this world? What do we hope, or fear, or love? Why do we live if all our hopes, fears, desires, longings, lives, labors, and love are not directed to that one necessary business for the sake of which alone we are on this earth, and that is the business of our eternal salvation? If we do not gain heaven, what good will all other things be to us? And must we then hear that terrible reproof from the lips of the divine Judge: "How often would I have gathered together. . . and thou wouldst not"?<sup>1</sup> How often have I desired to make you happy forever, and you would not accept My offer? O my Lord and my God! before it comes to that I will at once change my will. A hundred times have I said to Thee that I hope for heaven, but I see now that my hope was a deceitful one. A hundred times have I said that I wish to go to heaven, but I see now that my will was weak, nerveless, and half-hearted, a will that led me farther and farther from heaven. One good desire have I had after the other, but without effect; one good resolution after the other, but without fulfilment; the eyes of the mind were opened and looked towards heaven, but the feet remained fixed to the earth; my heart was attached to the world and its vanities. Now I say once for all: O my God! I will go to heaven; this is my earnest determination, and I will work for its fulfilment constantly by carefully avoiding all sin and the occasions of sin, and by diligently performing all my duties through a true, zealous love for Thee. And what is wanting to my weak will do Thou supply by Thy powerful grace, O Holy Ghost! who on this day didst so wonderfully change the apostles; that thus strengthened by Thy almighty power, I may hope with childlike confidence one day to enter heaven, where I shall see, love, and praise Thee with the heavenly Father, and His blessed Son, my Saviour, Jesus Christ, for all eternity. Amen.

Exhortation  
and conclusion  
to keep  
all the com-  
mandments  
in future.

<sup>1</sup> Quoties volui congregare . . . et nolulist. — Matt. xxiii. 37.

## FIFTY-EIGHTH SERMON.

ON THE DECEITFULNESS OF THE HOPE OF HEAVEN THAT IS  
FOUNDED ON CERTAIN PIOUS PRACTICES.

## Subject.

To neglect the observance of one single commandment of God, and to depend for one's salvation on any works of devotion and piety is a false and deceitful hope.—*Preached on Trinity Sunday.*

## Text.

*Docentes eos servare omnia quæcunque mandavi vobis.*—Matt. xxviii. 20.

“Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.”

## Introduction.

There we have again the real foundation and true basis of our hopes of heaven. “All power is given to Me in heaven and in earth,” says Our Lord to His disciples; as if He wished to say, I am able to bring all men to heaven. My will and desire is that all should be saved; but this will is not enough to ensure the salvation of all; he who wishes to go to heaven must contribute his share to that effect. “Going therefore teach ye all nations.” He who wishes to go to heaven must belong to the true faith; but faith alone in Me is not enough to secure salvation. He who desires to be saved must be baptized: “Baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.” But even this will not suffice: “Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.” He who desires heaven must keep My commandments, and indeed all of them. Truly then, my dear brethren, false and deceitful is the hope of those Christians who desire and hope to gain heaven, but do not earnestly strive to keep all the commandments with constancy, as we have seen on the last occasion. Now there are many—how shall I call them? simple-minded or superstitious?—who found their hopes of heaven partly on different pious practices that they are wont to perform, partly on some attempts at self-justification with which they try to excuse their sins. That these may not find out their mistake too late I now say to them:

Plan of Discourse.

*To neglect the observance of even one of the commandments, and to build one's hopes of salvation on any works of piety or attempts at self-justification is a false and deceitful hope. Such is the whole subject of this instruction, to the honor and glory of the Blessed Trinity and the profit and salvation of souls; that if we are earnestly minded to go to heaven, we may devote our whole attention to the full observance of everything that God and His only-begotten Son have commanded us to observe.*

Holy Ghost, do Thou give us Thy light and grace to this end; we beg this of Thee through the merits of Mary, the Mother of God, and the intercession of our holy guardian angels.

Fervent prayer, daily hearing holy Mass, generous almsdeeds and charity to the poor, frequent fasting, venerating the relics of the saints, devotion towards God and the Mother of God and to the saints—what beautiful, salutary, and precious works! What powerful means to gain and to preserve the grace and favor of God! And if they are made use of in the state of grace, with a good intention, how much they add to our sanctifying grace and merit here, and to eternal glory hereafter in heaven! Ah, is it possible for a Christian who is wont diligently to perform those works to be excluded from heaven and condemned to hell forever? Truly, my dear brethren, there is no doubt of it; if he who does those good works is wanting in true repentance for his sins, if he does not lead a pious life and keep all the commandments, he will certainly go to hell, and unfortunately there are Catholics, and not a few of them, who build their hopes of salvation on a foundation of the kind, and are certain of saving their souls, although at the time they are living in sin, and neglect certain duties of their state and condition to which they are bound in the sight of God. Frail building! Vain hope!

There are some very pleasing forms of prayer in which one finds a special devotion, and interior comfort and savor. It is a good and praiseworthy thing to say these often in the day with due devotion; no one could be found fault with for doing that. But some are so simple-minded and credulous as to believe firmly that all who say those prayers constantly as they are prescribed, and never omit them, will not die unrepentant, but by the merit of those prayers will receive the grace of final perseverance. Now that is a deceit of the devil, who thus makes fools of many, and

There is no devotion to which we can trust our salvation if we do not keep all the commandments.

Hence false is the hope that many found on certain prayers.

brings them under his yoke. For they place all their hopes of salvation in those prayers, and take little care to amend their lives, nay, sin all the more recklessly sometimes. To spend hours in the church praying, and then to swear, curse, and grumble the whole day long at home; to bring up children to vanity and idleness, to give them a bad example and yet to hope to get to heaven, oh, truly, that is a vain, deceitful hope! Hear what Our Lord says: "Not every one that saith to Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doth the will of My Father who is in heaven," and keeps all His commandments, "he shall enter into the kingdom of heaven."<sup>1</sup>

Even if those prayers are supported by alleged revelations and examples.

But they say there are instances related on good authority and approvals of the Holy See and divine revelations to prove that no one will be lost, or die without the last sacraments, or in the state of sin, who says this or that prayer as prescribed constantly; this or that saint has made use of that prayer and has had an apparition from heaven in approval of it; and all this is stated in approved prayer-books. But is everything you find in books bound to be true? I do not wish to run down the prayers; I let them stand at their own value; nor is it my business to examine into the truth of those alleged apparitions; but I do say that many of those so-called apparitions and approvals of the Pope that are printed and found even in prayer-books are only empty dreams and fables that deserve as little attention as the croaking of a raven. "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence," says the infallible Gospel of Jesus Christ, whose truth should make more impression on us than all the books in the world, "and the violent bear it away."<sup>2</sup> And you think you can get hold of it so easily by saying a few prayers?

For heaven is not won so easily by prayers of the kind.

Then indeed you poor hermits were laboring in vain when practising austerities in the wilderness! And the holy martyrs were fools to endure the torments inflicted on them by the tyrants to whom they freely gave themselves up. And the apostles have deceived us by binding every one who wishes to go to heaven to such a strict law, telling us that we must not live according to the usages of the world, that we must always mortify the flesh with its appetites, that we must crucify ourselves and bear our cross daily with patience, that we must wean our hearts from worldly desires, and so on. To no purpose has Christ

<sup>1</sup> Non omnis qui dicit mihi Domine, Domine, intrabit in regnum cœlorum, sed qui facit voluntatem Patris mei qui in cœlis est, ipse intrabit in regnum cœlorum.—Matt. vii. 21.

<sup>2</sup> Regnum cœlorum vim patitur, et violenti rapiunt illud.—Ibid. xi. 12.

given us the exhortation: "Strive to enter by the narrow gate;"<sup>1</sup> do violence to yourselves by penance that you may enter heaven. All this would be to no purpose if it were possible to save our souls by saying a few prayers. No; it is not so easy to walk into heaven. A pure conscience, a pious, innocent life, the way of the cross and penance, that is the only road to heaven, and no one can get there otherwise, although he were to say thousands of prayers, confirmed by thousands of revelations, and to say them with tears and sighs of fervor. Do you know what you merit by such prayers when you say them in the state of mortal sin? Even as much as you would gain by giving medicine to a dead body in the hope of restoring it to health. Prayer is necessary to gain heaven, there is no doubt of that, and it must not be omitted. It is necessary for the just man to keep him free from sin: "Pray that ye enter not into temptation,"<sup>2</sup> so says Our Lord Himself. It is necessary also for the sinner that he may obtain from God the grace of repentance and sincere conversion. Pray then fervently and diligently, but pray first of all for a contrite and penitent heart for all your sins; pray, but at the same time amend your life. Keep all the commandments of God; do all that God requires of you according to your state of life. If you fail in this, then you honor God only with the lips, while by actions you drive Him out of your heart, and all your praying will not help you to heaven.

The venerable Bede tells us of a noble warrior who used to flatter himself that he need not be troubled about the salvation of his soul because he always used to say his prayers and perform other works of devotion every day. Falling grievously ill, he was in danger of death, and had a terrible apparition; he saw two most beautiful youths in costly array (they were angels) entering his room; one of them produced a small book, and showing it to him, said: read, read. The sick man did not require much time nor have to turn over many leaves, so little was written in that book; it contained the account of the good actions of his life. "I saw," said the sick man, relating what had happened to him, "all the good I had ever done written down, and it was very small and trifling indeed." When the angels had retired a little to one side, a great number of demons entered, one of whom produced a large book, and showing it to the sick man, said to

Shown by  
an example.

<sup>1</sup> Contendite intrare per angustam portam.—Luke xiii. 24.

<sup>2</sup> Orate ut non intretis in tentationem.—Matt. xxvi. 41.

him: read, read. The sick man read, and saw that the book contained the account of his sins, and there were so many of them that the book was quite filled. Then the devils said to the angels: "Why do you remain here, knowing as you do that this man is ours? that he cannot go with you to heaven, but must come with us to hell." "You speak truly," replied the angels; "take him, and place him among the number of your lost souls." Thereupon the two heavenly spirits disappeared, and left the man to the devils. The poor man sighed, and howled, and raved. His friends and domestics hastened in; the priest came also; all exhorted him to repent; alas! said the unhappy man, there is no more time for me! The demons have me already in their power; I have been given into their hands! He then related the apparition he had seen, and immediately afterwards gave up the ghost in terrible torments and despair. Think of this, daring Christian, who trust your salvation to a few prayers. If at the end of your life the two books were brought to you in which are written your good and bad actions, what would you see in them? In the book of your sins you would see the account of all the bad thoughts and desires in which you took voluntary pleasure; all the unchaste glances in the church and on the streets; all your impure acts in houses and gardens; all the uncharitable talk you were guilty of in company with others; all your acts of injustice, gluttony, drunkenness, and hosts of sins of the kind, almost without number. And what would you see in the other book? A short prayer to the Blessed Virgin, that, according to a revelation that you read of in some book, would be sure to keep you from an unhappy death if you said it daily. Is that all? Yes; that is all. And by doing that little do you think you will gain the protection of the Mother of God, the angels, and saints? With that little will you be able to drive away the legion of devils who will bring the book of your many sins, and to send them back to hell? Oh, no! with all your prayers you will have to go to hell.

They, too,  
are deceived  
who fix  
their hopes  
on certain  
devotions.

Others put their trust in certain pious practices which they do at stated times; they give candles for the altar, promise and actually go on pilgrimages to miraculous pictures, churches, and chapels; they always wear blessed things, crosses, and indulgenced pennies; they get others to go to holy Communion for them and to pray for them; they fast every Friday or Saturday in the year, and on Good Friday eat nothing till evening; and when they have done those things they imagine they cannot be lost, but

must save their souls and go to heaven. But they give themselves little trouble to live in conformity with the laws of God and the Gospel of Christ. They give generous alms to the poor, and think that thus they pay off the debt contracted by their sins, although they do not repent or confess, or take any steps to amend their lives. They appeal to the advice that Daniel gave the wicked king Nabuchodonosor: "Redeem thou thy sins with alms, and thy iniquities with works of mercy to the poor," but they pay no attention to the words that follow: "perhaps He will forgive thy offences."<sup>1</sup> That is, it may be that the Lord will give you the grace of true repentance, which will be followed by forgiveness. They find great consolation in their wicked lives in the words of the elder Tobias to his son: "Alms deliver from all sin, and from death, and will not suffer the soul to go into darkness;" but they do not attach the right meaning to those words, and they forget what Tobias said in his exhortation: "All the days of thy life have God in thy mind; and take heed thou never consent to sin, nor transgress the commandments of the Lord, our God."<sup>2</sup> Ah, vain and deceitful is the hope of the sinner that is built on such a foundation!

Truly, "prayer is good with fasting and alms,"<sup>3</sup> but there must be a pure conscience with it, or at least the earnest will and determination to confess one's sins with a contrite heart, and to amend one's life. The Pharisee prayed in the temple; he fasted twice in the week; he gave the tenth part of all his goods to the poor (there you have almost all the pious practices I am speaking of); moreover he took God to witness that he did not live in grievous sin like other men; and yet on account of pride alone all his good works did not help to his justification. Generosity to the poor has, indeed, according to a divine promise, a special power of freeing from sin and eternal death; but how? Without true repentance and amendment of life? Oh, no! Hear what St. Paul says: "If I should distribute all my goods to feed the poor, . . . and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing."<sup>4</sup> And how do alms-deeds free from sin? We are to understand

Fasting and almsgiving are very meritorious, but they do not help to heaven him who does not keep the commandments.

<sup>1</sup> Peccata tua eleemosynis redime, et iniquitates tuas misericordis pauperum; forsitan ignoscet delictis tuis.—Dan. iv. 24.

<sup>2</sup> Eleemosyna ab omni peccato, et a morte liberat, et non patietur animam ire in tenebras. Omnibus autem diebus vite tue in mente habeto Deum, et cave ne aliquando peccato consentias, et prætermittas præcepta Domini Dei nostri.—Tob. iv. 11, 6.

<sup>3</sup> Bona est oratio cum jejuniis et eleemosyna.—Ibid. xii. 8.

<sup>4</sup> Si distribuero in cibos pauperum omnes facultates meas, caritatem autem non habuero, nihil mihi prodest.—I. Cor. xiii. 8.

these words of the punishment still due to sin after the guilt has been remitted by penance; or otherwise that alms-deeds are able to move the Almighty to touch the heart of the sinner, and to give him plentiful graces that he may repent and amend, and so be freed from the state of sin and from eternal death. But if a man is determined to persist in his evil ways and unlawful habits, and refuses to live according to the divine law, then I would say to him at once: unhappy, foolish man, you are deceiving yourself with all your pious works; with all your candles and pilgrimages, and blessed objects, and indulgenced pennies, and prayers, and Communions that others offer for you, with your fasting on Fridays and Saturdays, with your generous alms-deeds, you are going to hell! All you do is not of the least use to gain heaven for you!

Shown from  
Scripture.

It is true that an act of perfect contrition or perfect charity is a small thing in one who is conscious of mortal sin, yet God has promised to accept it and to forgive the sin. Small too are all the works of a penitent who goes to confession, yet God has promised to accept them, and by the absolution of the priest to free the person from sin. "Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them."<sup>1</sup> But never has God said that He will accept the works of a dead piety, that is, works of devotion performed in the state of mortal sin; nor has He promised to reward them with the assurance of escaping eternal damnation; on the other hand, He has often given us clearly to understand that He will not accept them, that He has no pleasure in them. "Say not," says the Holy Ghost by the wise Ecclesiasticus: "God will have respect to the multitude of my gifts, and when I offer to the most high God He will accept my offerings." And again: "The Most High approveth not the gifts of the wicked, neither hath He respect to the oblations of the unjust, nor will He be pacified for sins by the multitude of their sacrifices." And again: "So a man that fasteth for his sins, and doth the same again, what doth his humbling himself profit him? who will hear his prayer?"<sup>2</sup> See how God looks on your fasting, your alms-deeds, and all your pious practices, when they

<sup>1</sup> Quorum remisistis peccata, remittuntur eis—John xx. 23.

<sup>2</sup> Ne dicas: in multitudine munerum meorum respiciet Deus, et offerente me Deo altissimo, munera mea suscipiet. Dona iniquorum non probet Altissimus, nec respiciet in oblationes iniquorum, nec in multitudine sacrificiorum eorum propitiabitur peccatis. Homo qui jejuna in peccatis suis, et iterum eadem faciens, quid proficit humiliando se? orationem illius quis exaudiet?—Eccius. xxxiv. 23, 31.



proceed from a mind that is defiled with sin and persists in sin. God will not accept those things, nor approve of them, nor look at them, nor be appeased by them; you will not be heard. "Who will hear?" Hear what He says by the Prophet Jeremias, speaking to those who live on recklessly in sin, flattering themselves that they will not die in sin because they have visited the holy temple of Jerusalem, and there placed their offerings on the altar. You, He says, are building your hopes on a false, insecure, and most dangerous foundation. "Behold, you put your trust in lying words which shall not profit you." You do nothing but add sin to sin, and then come to My temple to pray, and think that you can thus easily make everything right again, and escape the punishment due to your sins. "To steal, to murder, to commit adultery, to swear falsely," etc. "And you have come and stood before Me in this house, in which My name is called upon, and have said: We are delivered because we have done all these abominations." But is My temple then built as a place of refuge and safety for murderers, thieves, adulterers, and such like godless rabble? "Is this house then... become a den of robbers? I am He: I have seen it, saith the Lord. And I will cast you away from before My face. . . . For I spoke not to your fathers, and I commanded them not... concerning the matter of burnt offerings and sacrifices. But this thing I commanded them, saying: Harken to My voice, and I will be your God,"<sup>1</sup> etc. See now with what confidence you can rely on your voluntary works of piety, if you do not fulfil what God has so expressly commanded, and avoid what He has forbidden under the pain of incurring His anger. With reason does St. Augustine say: "As the venial sins, without which one cannot live on this earth, do not hinder the just man from gaining eternal life, so the few good works that are found in the lives of even the most abandoned will not help the wicked man to salvation." Rarely will you find a man, at least among Catholics, who, no matter how bad he is, does not sometimes go to a church, hear Mass on week-days, give an alms to the poor, and say a few prayers; but just as those venial sins, which can hardly all be avoided by a just man, do not hin-

<sup>1</sup> Ecce vos confiditis vobis in sermonibus mendacii, qui non proderunt vobis. Furari, occidere, adulterari, jurare mendaciter, etc. Et venistis et stetitistis coram me in domo hac, in qua invocatum est nomen meum, et dixistis: liberati sumus eo quod fecerimus omnes abominationes istas. Numquid ergo spelunca latronum facta est domus ista? Ego, ego sum, ego vidi, dicit Dominus. Proficiam vos a facie mea. Non sum locutus cum patribus vestris, et non præcepi eis . . . de verbo holocaustatum et victimarum. Sed hoc verbum præcepi eis, dicens audite vocem meam, et ero vobis Deus.—Jerem. vii. 8-11, 15, 22, 23.

der him from saving his soul, so the works of devotion which even a sinner can hardly live without will not save him from eternal damnation.

Confirmed  
by an ex-  
ample.

You have doubtless often heard of that unhappy priest, Sapricius, of whom the Bollandists write in the life of the holy martyr, Nicephorus. Sapricius and Nicephorus had been intimate friends for a long time, but at last they conceived such a violent hatred for each other that they would not speak to or greet each other, but kept rigorously apart. After a considerable time Nicephorus sent some of his friends to Sapricius to beg his pardon for having offended him. But the latter, persisting in his hatred, refused to grant the pardon prayed for. The penitent Nicephorus sent again, and renewed his prayers with still greater earnestness, but was again unsuccessful. Sapricius remained doggedly obstinate. A third time did Nicephorus humble himself still farther, and offered to make any satisfaction that the scandal of their enmity might be removed from the eyes of the Christian people; he reminded him that now, during the persecution, all Christians must be ready and willing to give their lives for the faith; that one should prepare for such a beautiful death by pardoning all injuries and living in brotherly love; but all to no purpose; Sapricius refused to yield. Meanwhile the persecution was carried on with more cruelty than ever under the emperors Valerian and Gallus; Sapricius was arrested as a Christian and brought before the prefect. He confessed that he was a Christian and a priest, and professed his readiness to suffer all kinds of torments rather than deny his faith or offer incense to the gods. He was cast into a gloomy dungeon, and bore that; he was racked and tortured most frightfully, and bore that too; his whole body was one wound. but he still kept in his heart his hatred of Nicephorus. At last the judge, seeing that his constancy could not be overcome, sentenced him to be beheaded. He heard this sentence with joy, and thought that, as he was giving his life for the faith. God would surely not abandon him. As he was led forth to execution, Nicephorus met him twice on the road, and falling on his knees before him with downcast eyes, honored him with the name of martyr, and begged his forgiveness: "Martyr of Christ, forgive me!" But Sapricius turned his face away and would not answer him. He still refused to forgive. At the place of execution Nicephorus again fell at his feet and renewed

his prayer with the utmost humility, and shedding bitter tears; but all to no purpose; Sappricius would not forgive. Consider now for a moment, O tepid Christian! how much more that unhappy priest had done than you in order to gain the mercy of God. He had made public profession of his faith, endured frightful torments for it; he was not guilty of any attempt at revenge, nor of impurity, or deceit, or injustice; he only nourished in his heart a deadly enmity. Can you point to anything of the kind that you have done for the divine honor? You have not endured chains or torments, nor even shed one drop of blood for God's sake. All that you can allege in your favor is that, influenced by a sort of lifeless piety, you have now and then given an alms to the poor, or mortified yourself in food or drink, or visited a church, or said some short prayers every day. This is all you can boast of having done for the honor of God. Let us return to Sappricius. After all his glorious exploits, which, however, were performed in the state of mortal sin, how did he end? I shudder when I think of it. When the executioner told him to bend his knee to receive the fatal stroke, he suddenly changed completely, and abandoned by God on account of his obstinacy, he asked: why do you wish to cut off my head? The executioner answered: because you refuse to obey the emperors, and to adore our gods. Wait, then, said Sappricius, do not strike; I will do as the emperors wish, and sacrifice to the gods. Thus he lost the faith, became an idolater, and was ruined forever. The crown of martyrdom which he threw away so foolishly fell to the share of the hated Nicephorus, who on the same day, in the same place, gained the palm of martyrdom, and gloriously gave up his life for the faith of Jesus Christ. See how true are the words of the Almighty: "To whom shall I have respect, but to him that is poor and little, and of a contrite spirit, and that trembleth at My words?"<sup>1</sup> To whom shall I show mercy? I will look with favor on him who humbles himself before Me; who fears My justice, and endeavors to keep My commandments. But you neither humble yourself before God, nor fear His justice, nor keep His commandments; and yet, trusting in some lifeless good works, you hope that He will regard you with an eye of mercy, and actually admit you into heaven. Ah, you deceive yourself most grossly; your confidence is vain and unfounded.

<sup>1</sup> Ad quem respiciam, nisi ad pauperulum, et contritum spiritu, et trementem sermones meos:— *Is. lxxvi. 2.*

Others, too,  
are de-  
ceived, who  
put their  
trust in va-  
rious sodal-  
ties.

A third class place their hopes of salvation in certain sodalities and confraternities, in which they are enrolled. True, it was a holy thought inspired by God that led to the foundation of those sodalities and confraternities, under the name of the Most Holy Sacrament of the Altar, or of the Blessed Mother of God, or of the Memorial of the Passion of Christ, or the Death-Agony of Our Lord, or in honor of a saint; for souls are thus bound spiritually together in Christ, much good is effected, and special graces are obtained from heaven. But as there is nothing so holy that the devil does not try to work something out of it to further his own ends (as the saying is, where God builds a church the devil builds a chapel), that spirit of evil tries to do mischief by those very sodalities, and though they were intended to further the welfare of souls he by his craft turns them into a means of destruction, by persuading silly people that if they are enrolled in those sodalities and keep their rules they cannot be damned. And many trust to this, place no restraint on their evil passions, and indulge freely in sin. This is a most detestable error and a deceit of the evil one. For, without waiting to examine into the truth or falsehood of those alleged revelations which are adduced in support of the statement that members of those bodies cannot be lost forever, it is quite certain and an undoubted truth of faith that no confraternity, or work, or prayer, or devotion will be of any help to the supernatural merit or salvation of one who is in the state of mortal sin; and such a man may wear all the cords, scapulars, rosaries, blessed pennies, etc., he pleases; he will assuredly be lost if he continues in the state of mortal sin and does not do penance before his death. The many indulgences granted by the popes to those sodalities are of no avail to take away sin; they help only to remit the punishment due to sin, and that, too, only to those who are free from the guilt of mortal sin and in the state of grace. No absolution, not even the General Absolution, can free the soul from sin, save and except sacramental absolution alone, given in confession to him who is truly and sincerely sorry for having offended God.

To be a  
member of  
a sodality  
and live in  
sin causes  
deeper dam-  
nation.

I am a sodalist, you say, a member of this or that confraternity; therefore, on account of the spiritual tie which unites us, I receive my share of the good works done by my fellow-sodalists. Truly you do! And for your comfort I will tell you something more: you are a Catholic, and consequently a member of the

true Church of Christ; therefore you are in the Communion of saints, as you say in the Apostles' Creed; that is, you receive a share of all the prayers and good works of every Catholic in the world. But if you are in the state of sin, you are a dead and rotten member of the confraternity, of the Church, and therefore you can derive as little fruit from the good works done therein as an amputated or mortified finger can receive from the food and drink which the rest of the healthy body consumes. The most you can expect is that the other members who are in the state of grace may by their prayers and good works obtain for you from God the grace of true conversion. Be enrolled then in a sodality; that is a good thing for all; but be careful that you are enrolled also among the beloved children of God. Sodalities and confraternities are established with the view of making their members more holy and pious, and that by mutual good example they may spur one another on to virtue and the fear of the Lord, so that after a holy life they may die a happy death, and love forever in heaven the God whom they loved together on earth. See from this what a fearful abuse you make of this excellent means of furthering the interests of your soul, and what a strict account you will have to render in the judgment for having made your title as member of a sodality an excuse for sinning all the more freely, relying on the fact of your membership as being enough to save you from all danger of being damned. A vain and treacherous hope! For you may take it for granted that you will burn all the deeper in hell because you led such a wicked life in such holy company.

A fourth class place their hopes in their so-called love for and devotion to the Mother of God, and they live on carelessly in sin. No one who is devout to the Blessed Virgin can be lost: that is their favorite saying. A vain (ah! must I say it? Forgive me, dear Mother Mary; my only object in speaking is to increase thy honor in a true sense!)—a vain, deceitful hope! Most Blessed Virgin! all the Fathers of the Church are unanimous on the point, countless great sinners have experienced it and still experience it every day; I must and will always maintain before the world with grateful heart that I know by my own experience, in myself and others, that next to God thou art the only hope of sinners, the Mother of grace, the Mother of mercy, the Refuge of all, the Advocate of sinners; whose prayers often move the otherwise implacable God to withhold the scourge and

They, too, are deceived who place all their hope in a false devotion to the Blessed Virgin.

receive man again into His grace. I acknowledge, too, that none of thy children shall be lost forever; but wilt thou reckon in their number, and protect by thy intercession, and bring to eternal salvation those whose love and devotion to thee consists only in a few prayers that they say every day as a cloak for their wickedness, who honor thee only with the lips that they may all the more freely offend thee and thy divine Son? Presumptuous sinners, your hope, I repeat, is a vain and deceitful one. Yours is not the love and devotion that characterizes the true child of Mary. On a future occasion I shall speak of this more in detail.

Or on the sayings of some learned men.

Finally, there are very many who rely for salvation on blind guides, whom they allow to lead them; that is, they excuse this or that vice to which they are addicted, and which they imagine they cannot avoid without the greatest difficulty; and they persuade themselves that they are not bound under pain of grievous sin to avoid it, or they say this or that custom is not one that will hinder them from walking on the narrow road to heaven. And that conclusion they arrive at either because they have read in some book or other that the vice may be excused from mortal sin, a thing they are very glad to learn, or because they have come across some confessor or other who is pious, as we must suppose them all to be, but does not understand the matter clearly, or has not considered it properly, or has not fully understood the doubt proposed to him, or has never noticed anything wrong in the act or custom through simplicity, a solitary life, or piety, or who was afraid to give his penitent a disagreeable answer, an unwelcome exhortation, and to speak the truth out boldly. Those people seek confessors of that kind, for they know well that other learned priests will not answer them as they wish. Thus they go on the authority of what the confessor has said to them, and pretend that there is no grievous obligation on them to alter their mode of life; or else they ground their position on the fact that the confessor has never asked or exhorted them concerning the matter. There you have the whole basis of their hope; relying on that, they say, the thing is lawful; I may do it and still go to heaven. Such and such a confessor has told me so; if there was anything wrong in it he would have warned me, although I have never asked him about it. So that I can go on in good faith. Oh, what a false and presumptuous hope! Just as there is no law-suit so unjust that somewhere in this wicked

world a lawyer may not be found to defend it, so too there is no opinion so false, no custom so unlawful and vicious that will not find patrons in the perverse world to approve of it. But can any sensible man depend on the silence or approval of such patrons in a matter that concerns his eternal welfare, and depend on them too against the sound teaching of all the holy Fathers, the judgment of men enlightened by God, the warnings and exhortations of the apostles, and the principles of the Gospel of Jesus Christ? God will not judge us according to what this or that man says, but according to the laws and rules of His eternal truths. What will it help us then to say: this or that person sees no harm in this; he told me I could go on safely. Will that person act as your advocate on the day of judgment, and save you from the sentence of eternal death? If you find that to be the case, I shall congratulate you; otherwise it will then be too late for you to try to mend matters.

The same blind hope is entertained by many who excuse and defend their bad habits by appealing to the conduct of men of the world at the present day. Others do so, they say; why should it not be lawful for me as well? The greater number do so; they have consciences too; amongst them are many good and pious souls who wish to go to heaven, so that the thing cannot be so very bad after all. And even if it were not altogether right, custom has prescribed against the law. At all events I did not begin it, and therefore I am free from sin. But what a perverse mode of reasoning! Those people are like the thieves who asked the judge to do away with the gallows; the judge said to them: Do you give up stealing, and then I will do away with the gallows. But the thieves replied: We did not introduce thieving, and we will not abolish it. Nor, said the judge, did I introduce the gallows, nor will I abolish it. If that style of argument were admissible, then you might go and do what you please; wallow in impurity whenever you have the opportunity; it is lawful, for, alas! many others make a habit of that vice. Drink until you are bereft of your senses; there is nothing to prevent you; for drunkenness has now become so fashionable that men are no longer ashamed of it. Curse and swear as well as you know how; you are quite at liberty to do so, for there are few houses nowadays in which that hellish speech is not indulged in by young and old frequently in the day. In all these things you can appeal to the argument: many others do it, therefore it is law-

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ful for me too. And further: at all events I did not commence it, and so the sin is not to be laid at my door. What do you think of this? Will you trust to it to excuse those sins? But just as little can you defend other abuses that are contrary to the law of the Gospel by appealing to custom, to what others are wont to do, although those abuses are looked on as honorable in the eyes of the vain world. No! no custom or prescription can hold against the law of God, the fundamental truths of the Gospel of Christ. If I do anything that does not harmonize with that Gospel, although others and even the majority of men do the same, I sin with them; and if I persist in sin I shall be damned with them, no matter how numerous they may be.

These latter  
are the most  
foolish of  
all.

Oh, what blindness! With reason does the Holy Ghost say by the Wise Man: "The eyes of a wise man are in his head; the fool walketh in darkness."<sup>1</sup> But have not all men, sinners as well as the just, their eyes in their heads? Yes, as far as the eyes of the body are concerned, but not the eyes of the mind. "The fool," says Cornelius à Lapide, "lives as if his eye were in his heel, not in his head."<sup>2</sup> How is that? If a man had eyes only in the soles of his feet he could see nothing but the steps of others in which he treads; but he could have no idea of what lies before him, of where the road leads to, and what will be at the end of it. In that blind and stupid manner many walk on the road to eternity; they have eyes only in the soles of their feet; they can see nothing but the footprints of others; they live as they see others live; like sheep, they follow one another, and have not the least idea of where the others are leading them. This is the broad way of which Our Lord says: "Wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there are who go in thereat."<sup>3</sup> Therefore when in doubt as to the lawfulness of a certain custom, the very fact that it is followed by many who live according to the rules of the vain world should make me suspect it, and resolve rather to imitate those who reject that custom for the sake of their soul's salvation, because they know that many sensible, learned, and pious servants of God have good reasons founded on the word of God for considering that custom unlawful. It is these, I say, whom I should imitate if I wish to act sensibly; for thus I am certain

<sup>1</sup> *Sapientis oculi in capite ejus stultus in tenebris ambulat.*—Ecclesi. ii. 14.

<sup>2</sup> *Stultus perinde ac si oculos haberet in calcaneo, non in capite.*

<sup>3</sup> *Lata porta et spatiosa via est, quæ ducit ad perditionem, et multi sunt qui intrant per eam.*—Matt. vii. 13.



that I do no wrong, but rather good; better that than to follow the multitude, and live in doubt as to whether I am sinning with them, and accompanying them on the broad road to ruin. This one reflection should and must suffice to make me resolve on that course of action in a matter on which depends my eternal happiness or misery, a matter in which I should clearly adopt the safest course. To say: perhaps I shall be saved although I adopt this or that custom that so many follow, is as much as saying that I shall not be saved at all. All those who are now in hell could also have saved their souls, but they did not. Therefore if I wish to make sure of my salvation, I must not let it depend on a perhaps, nor on the custom of others, but on a more certain foundation. I shall not be asked by my Judge what others have done, but what I have done myself, and how I have lived with others. "For we must all be manifested before the judgment-seat of Christ, that everyone may receive the proper things of the body, according as he hath done, whether it be good or evil."<sup>1</sup>

Forget not the warning of Cassianus with which I conclude: "Imitate in your life the few, that you may merit to be elected with the few, and to find a place in heaven."<sup>2</sup> Do sincere penance; repent of and confess your sins and amend your life; live according to the rules laid down for us by Our Lord in His holy Gospel. Live as He lived; as His faithful servants live; keep the commandments of God, keep them all without exception, keep them constantly; in all things, at all times, in all circumstances do what you know to be the will of God. To build one's hopes of salvation on anything else, no matter how holy it is,—prayers, confraternities, works of devotion—is a vain, false, deceitful hope, that can have only one ending, that of the reprobate in hell. "Therefore we have erred,"<sup>3</sup> and have lost the right road to heaven. Ah, my God, how often have I not deceived myself with those false hopes, and done so wilfully that I might not be obliged to do what I was unwilling to do, or to avoid what I did not wish to avoid! I am sorry from my heart for my wilful blindness! While I still have time I will return to the right way of Thy elect, the way of Christian humility and modesty, of the cross and mortification, the way of Thy law, that

Conclusion  
and resolution  
to live  
with the few  
and keep  
the com-  
mandments  
constantly.

<sup>1</sup> Omnes nos manifestari oportet ante tribunal Christi, ut referat unusquisque propria corporis, prout gessit, sive bonum, sive malum. —II. Cor. v. 10.

<sup>2</sup> Vive ergo cum paucis, ut cum paucis eligi et inveniri merearis in cœlo.

<sup>3</sup> Ergo erravimus. —Wis. v. 6.

with Thy servant David I may be able to say joyfully at the end of my life: "I have run the way of Thy commandments, when Thou didst enlarge my heart."<sup>1</sup> I have kept all Thou hast told me to keep; now I expect the reward Thou hast promised, that is, none other but Thyself in Thy kingdom of heaven which Thou hast prepared for me. Amen.

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*FIFTY-NINTH SERMON.*

**ON THE VANITY OF THE HOPES OF HEAVEN THAT ARE FOUNDED  
ON A FALSE DEVOTION TO MARY.**

**Subject.**

1. Some have a false and presumptuous love and devotion to the Mother of God, and build their hope of heaven thereon; a false and deceitful hope. 2. Others have a tepid, imperfect love for the Mother of God, and build their hope of heaven thereon; a good hope indeed, but not a very firm one.—*Preached on the feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin.*

**Text.**

*Qui me invenerit, inveniet vitam, et hauriet salutem a Domino.*  
—Prov. viii. 35. From to-day's Epistle.

"He that shall find me shall find life, and shall have salvation from the Lord."

**Introduction.**

This is the joyful day on which the world first beheld that most blessed Virgin, of whom was born Jesus the Saviour of the world. Rejoice, ye just! your advocate, by whom God wishes to secure your salvation, is born. Rejoice, O sinners! for the refuge of sinners is born, by whose hands God will give you the grace of repentance and true conversion. Rejoice, especially you who love Mary! Hear what she says to you: "He that shall find me shall find life, and shall have salvation from the Lord." No one who loves Mary shall be lost forever. So it is; to love and honor Mary is one of the surest signs of predestination to heaven, as I have often told you in my sermons. But yet there are many who do not understand this in the proper sense, and

<sup>1</sup> *Viam mandatorum tuorum cucurri, cum dilatasti cor meum.*—Ps. cxviii. 32.

who imagine that if they have any sort of devotion to our blessed Lady they are sure of heaven. Truly, a gross and grievous error, which causes the ruin of many souls; and it comes from the fact that they mistake for true love and devotion that which is not really so at all. To refute this error and show in what it consists is the subject of the present sermon.

### Plan of Discourse.

*Some have a false and presumptuous love for and devotion to the Mother of God, and build their hope of heaven thereon; a false and deceitful hope, as we shall see in the first part. Others have a tepid and imperfect love for and devotion to the Mother of God, and build their hope of heaven thereon; a good hope indeed, but not a very firm one; the second part. The first concerns many sinners; the second, many of the just.*

Mary, Queen of heaven! obtain for us on this joyful feast of thy nativity, with the help of our holy guardian angels, a true, childlike, and perfect love for and devotion to thee, and then with full hope and confidence we shall abandon ourselves to thy motherly goodness, and expect the happiness of heaven.

It is a well-known sign of feline treachery to lick before and scratch behind, as the saying goes. A common trick in the perverse world is to bear a smiling countenance, a caressing demeanor, to offer one's services and pay a thousand compliments to a person whom one hates in his heart, and despises, and is determined to persecute on every possible occasion. Treachery of the kind is condemned even in unreasoning brutes, much more so in men; and amongst honorable people nothing can be said which tends more to lower a man in their estimation than: he does not act honorably; one cannot trust him; he is not worthy of confidence; he says one thing, and does another.

A false friend is detested everywhere.

Most sinners act thus treacherously towards the Blessed Virgin when they pretend to honor and love her. If you seek for proofs of their devotion and love to her, where will you find them? Nowhere unless on their lips, with which they praise and bless her; on their tongue, with which they invoke and call upon her; in their hands, which they fold to pray to her; in their knees, that they bend in her honor; in the outward signs, scapulars, rosaries, and so forth, with which they give themselves out as her servants. Mere empty flatteries and compliments!

Most sinners are false friends of the Blessed Virgin; they are friends only in appearance.

While their hearts are full of hatred towards her.

But look meanwhile, if you can do so, into the hearts of those servants of Mary, and you will find them full of cunning, nay, to speak more correctly, of the bitterest hatred to the Blessed Virgin. "This people honoreth me with their lips," she might well say in the words of her divine Son, "but their heart is far from me."<sup>1</sup> For could you imagine that he loves you who does all he can to displease you? Do you think a mother really loves her son, who wilfully causes him all the annoyance, chagrin, and trouble possible? Would she not rather be looked on as his worst enemy? Now what is in reality the conduct of those pretended servants of Mary whose devotion consists of mere words? They remain attached to their usual vices; they are immersed in the filth of sin; they keep on committing the same impure actions from year to year; they maintain unlawful intimacies, remain in the occasion of sin, retain possession of ill-gotten goods, nourish hatred and anger against their neighbor, and indulge in the hateful habit of cursing and swearing. In a word, they heap sin on sin with the utmost recklessness, and they often do not confess them properly, seldom repent of them sincerely, hardly ever amend their lives. What else is that but acting in all things contrary to the wishes of that Blessed Virgin who, being always free from every stain, regards sin with an almost infinite hatred, displeasure, and disgust.

She does not look on them as her friends and children.

Could those eyes, that were never opened but to contemplate her divine Son and heaven, look on him lovingly as a friend whose eyes are opened only to indulge in impure glances? Could those hands, that were never raised but to pray to and bless her Creator, give her gifts and graces into hands that are stretched out to unbecoming or unjust actions? Could that mouth, that always praised God, claim as a faithful servant him whose mouth is, as the Prophet David says, like an open grave? "Their throat is an open sepulchre: with their tongues they acted deceitfully; the poison of asps is under their lips. Their mouth is full of cursing and bitterness."<sup>2</sup> Could those ears, that were never open to wickedness, receive with favor the prayer of him who listens with pleasure to impure or uncharitable discourse? Could that heart, that always dwelt in heaven in thought, and that was inflamed with divine love more than all the seraphim, have any love or affection for one whose heart is constantly filled

<sup>1</sup> *Populus hic labiis me honorat, cor autem eorum longe est a me.*—Matt. xv. 8.

<sup>2</sup> *Sepulchrum patens est guttur eorum: linguis suis dolose agebant, venenum aspidum sub labiis eorum. Quorum os maledictione et amaritudine plenum est.*—Ps. xlii. 3.

with all sorts of wicked desires and longings? Could Mary, the holiest of all the saints, wish to be served by one who is the slave and friend of the devil? Can she consider as her child one who is the sworn enemy and persecutor of Christ, her divine Son?

To live in sin, what else is it but to take sides with the devil against God, to wage perpetual war on Christ, to insult, dishonor, and torment Him, as far as the sinner can? Could that Mother, and such a Mother, behold that without pain, endure it without displeasure, and even treat as her dear friend him who acts so wickedly? It is an especial characteristic of every love to rejoice in the welfare of the loved one, and also to feel most keenly all that annoys and contradicts him. In what creature did love ever attain such a degree as it did in Mary for her Son? Your love, O parents! for your sons and daughters is but child's play in comparison with the love of this holy Virgin for Christ, her Son. With reason does St. Anselm say: "The love of this Mother for her Son exceeds all the love that parents have for their children."<sup>1</sup> What greater sorrow or grief then can be caused her than that which she feels when she sees her only beloved Son mocked at and despised by sinners, and, as St. Paul says, again crucified and slain by them? And you who are guilty of that, can you still pretend to be a devout servant of the Mother of God? You are a false and perjured traitor; you do not act honestly with all your seeming devotion, as long as you do not amend your life; you lie most shamefully when you say that you love Mary. "You that love the Lord hate evil,"<sup>2</sup> says the Prophet David. And changing the words a little I say: "You that love Our Lady hate evil;" if you really are devoted to this great Queen of heaven, this Mistress of the world, then prove your devotion by hating sin above all things, for sin she cannot bear. This merciful lady interceded for the poor people at the marriage-feast of Cana, but on one condition, that they should do the will of her Son. When she said to Our Lord: "They have no wine," He seemed at first somewhat disinclined to grant her request; but she turned to the servants and told them to do whatever He would command: "Whatsoever He shall say to you, do ye." Nor was the favor granted till Our Lord's commands were observed. There were in the room six

For they are  
sworn foes  
of her dear  
Son.

<sup>1</sup> Excedit omnes amores parentum in filios amor istius matris in Filium suum.

<sup>2</sup> Qui diligitis Dominum, odite malum.—Ps. xvi. 10.

large pitchers; these Christ told them to fill with water: "Fill the water-pots with water." The poor people who did not know what was to happen might well have been amazed at this order, and might have said to themselves: what is the use of filling the pitchers with water? It is wine we want, and not water; it is wine, not water, that the guests wish to have; and if we fill the pitchers as desired we only lose our time and weary ourselves for nothing. However, they did not say those things, but without further hesitation did as they were commanded, and filled all the vessels to the top. Then Jesus said to them: "Draw out now, and carry to the chief steward of the feast. And they carried it,"<sup>1</sup> and found that it was no longer water, but the best of wine. From this we should learn that it is necessary for us to keep the commandments of God if we wish to have good grounds for hoping that Mary will lend us her powerful intercession to secure the salvation of our souls. You go now to her altars and say the rosary every day; for her sake you give alms to the poor, etc.; but how do you fulfil the divine will? "Whatsoever He shall say to you, do ye;" that is what the Blessed Virgin requires of you. God says to you: you must lay aside that secret hate and anger against your neighbor; you must avoid all injustice and impurity. He says: you must honor your superiors; you must pardon from your heart those who offend you; if you are in the state of sin you must at once repent and make a good confession; you must love God above all things, and your neighbor as yourself. See, that is what God and the Mother of God expect from you. As long as you refuse to obey in those things, your love for and devotion to the Blessed Virgin is only mere outward flattery and deceit.

Such conduct on the part of sinners is great presumption when they hope to go to heaven.

And it is moreover great presumption. For what is the object of your pretended devotion to Mary? What do you wish to gain by the prayers you daily address to her? What do you desire or expect from her? That she should help me. But in what? Must she help you to sin, which you do every day? No; she must help me to obtain pardon of my sins from God. What! pardon of sins that you are not sorry for and have no intention of avoiding? And must she obtain for you the grace of God, while you reject and trample under foot the graces offered you? She must save me from hell, that I may not be lost forever.

<sup>1</sup> Vinum non habent. Quodcumque dixerit vobis, facite. Implete hydrias aqua. Haurite nunc et ferte architriclino. Et tulerunt.—John II. 3, 5, 7, 8.

From hell, to which you are going every day nearer and nearer of your own accord? She must help me to get to heaven. To heaven, which you close more and more against yourself by your sins, as by so many bolts? Go and throw yourself into the Mosele, and trust that your mother, who is standing on the bank, will save you from drowning; leap into the fire and call on your father to help you out; try this only once and see how you will fare. Oh, what superstitious presumption! God Himself could not help you under the circumstances; He will not, nay, in the present arrangements of His providence, He cannot save your soul without your own co-operation; so that you expect Mary to have more power in this respect than her almighty Creator? No; neither Mary nor any other saint will protect a man who only abuses that protection to sin all the more freely. Nay, God forbids them to intercede when confidence in their prayers encourages the sinner to be more hardy in his revolt against God. When Achillas and Alexander, two priests in high authority in the city of Alexandria, asked St. Peter, bishop of that city, to receive back into the communion of the faithful, Arius, who had appeared to repent, he gave them this answer: My brethren, I am not wanting either in pity or in goodness; I know how to have compassion on a penitent sinner; but that God who sees the heart has already been beforehand with me; Christ Himself has appeared to me with a torn garment, and said that it was Arius who had torn it. And He told me too that I should be asked to receive him back again; but that I must be on my guard and never allow myself to be persuaded to admit His sworn enemy into favor. If you persist in mortal sin, and yet put your trust in the invocation of the Blessed Virgin, you have just reason to dread a similar misfortune. Perhaps Our Lord has been already beforehand with His Blessed Mother; perhaps He has warned her, saying: You will be asked to take that enemy of Mine under your protection; but do not allow yourself to be induced to help one who will not cease to offend Me.

But I know well what you think. I acknowledge, you say, that I cannot go to heaven without doing penance, but I have a firm hope that the Blessed Virgin will not allow me to die without penance. To this end she will obtain for me in my old age, or at the end of my life, powerful graces that will enable me to repent of my sins. Yes? And what grounds have you for expecting those graces? for you now act very badly towards her and

Or not to die  
without the  
grace of re-  
pentance.

her divine Son. Is that the reason why she should give you extraordinary graces that are rarely given to any one? And by what means shall she get them for you? Where are your prayers or works of devotion that she can present before the throne of God? Are the trifling praises you offer her daily worth being presented to the Almighty? But what is the good of prayer in the mouth of a sinner whose heart is far from God? Perhaps the communions you receive sometimes on her feast-days find favor in her sight? But what efficacy can communions have that are for the most part unworthy and sacrilegious, since you make no efforts to amend your life?

That is even  
a blas-  
phemy  
against the  
Blessed Vir-  
gin.

But, you say, she can and will offer her own prayers and merits to God for me. Why should she do so? That you may indulge your passions for a while longer, and continue to live in sin without fear? Oh, this is not only gross presumption, but a grievous blasphemy against the Blessed Virgin. So you wish to make her a cloak for your wickedness? And her intercession is to help you to despise and offend her beloved Son recklessly and daringly? And she is appointed advocate between her Son and men that vice may reign supreme under her protection, and sin be committed more freely? Could she not with reason complain of those false-hearted servants in the terms in which God spoke to the Prophet Isaias of His faithless people: "Thou hast made Me to serve with thy sins; thou hast wearied Me with thy iniquities"?<sup>1</sup> Do you greet me as your Mother and pretend to be my children that I may help you in your abominations? that I may defend and shelter you in your wickedness? See, my dear brethren, what a terrible and outrageous thing it is! So far have some gone that they make devotion to the Mother of God only an excuse to sin all the more boldly. "I shall have peace," they say with those people mentioned in Deuteronomy, "and will walk on in the naughtiness of my heart."<sup>2</sup> I will live in peace and pleasure, according to my desire, and gratify all my inclinations. "I shall have peace;" I have nothing to fear; as long as I only honor Mary every day I am in no danger of damnation. No client of Mary shall be lost forever. I trust in her power and motherly mercy; she is the refuge of sinners as well as of the just. And do we not read of grievous sinners who refused to amend their wicked lives, and yet were miraculously

<sup>1</sup> *Servire me fecisti in peccatis tuis, præbuiisti mihi laborem in iniquitatibus tuis.*—Is. xliii. 24.

<sup>2</sup> *Pax erit mihi, et ambulabo in pravitae cordis mei.*—Deut. xix. 19.



converted at the end, and saved by the prayers of the Blessed Virgin?

What you say now is true enough; Mary is the Mother of mercy—a sure refuge of sinners. Ah, truly that is the case. O Blessed Virgin! if thou hadst not helped me, where should I now be? What would have become of me, a wretched sinner? Again I say: Mary is the refuge of sinners, but of those who are earnestly minded to do penance humbly, who beg for the grace of repentance and amend their lives, and not of those who are still determined to persist in sin. True it is that she is a Mother to those who call upon her, and looks on them as her children, but only when they are true children of hers. The servant of Mary will not be lost forever; there is no doubt of that; it is a truth founded on the authority of the holy Fathers, on reason and experience; but it must be understood of faithful servants, and not of slaves of the devil. Great, exceeding great is her power; mighty her intercession to obtain from God all she wishes; that too is true, and I agree with St. Bernard in saying that “from her comes all our hope, all our salvation, all our grace;”<sup>1</sup> but she bestows those gifts on her friends and not on her declared enemies. Great was the power of Queen Esther with Assuerus; did she employ it in favor of Aman? In spite of his prostrations and prayers he was hanged on a gibbet. The sole refuge and protection of the Israelites was the ark of the covenant, a figure of our blessed Lady; and yet, in the very presence of the ark, thirty thousand of them bit the dust. “There was an exceeding great slaughter, for there fell of Israel thirty thousand footmen.”<sup>2</sup> And why should we wonder at this, asks Theodoret, for although they honored the ark, they were steeped in sin?

Finally, it is true that many great and obstinate sinners have been wonderfully converted and saved by her intercession; but mark well that it has been done by her wonderfully, that is, miraculously. Have you good grounds for hoping for a similar miracle in your own favor? If so, then why do you poor peasants plague yourselves to such an extent, laboring in your vineyards on the banks of the Moselle? Why do you toil and moil so hard? Go and fill all your vessels with water, and wait with confidence till Christ, at the prayer of His Mother, turns the water into wine. Yes, you say, a likely thing indeed! But why

She is the refuge of sinners; but of those who wish to amend.

She has helped to save most wicked sinners, but in an extraordinary way that not every one can reasonably expect.

<sup>1</sup> Si quid spei, si quid salutis, si quid gratiæ in nobis est, ab ea noverimus redundare.

<sup>2</sup> Facta est plaga magna nimis; et ceciderunt de Israel triginta millia peditum.—1. Kings iv. 10.

not? It has happened already; and we read of it, not in a history of doubtful authority in which examples are sometimes recorded without sufficient proofs of their veracity, but in the Holy Scripture itself, which cannot be wrong; we are assured that Our Lord worked a miracle of the kind at the wedding-feast of Cana, as we saw in the beginning of this sermon. But I am afraid you would have a long time to wait for such a wonderful thing to happen in your case.

Therefore  
that hope of  
sinners is a  
treacherous  
one.

Therefore, you who are in sin, no matter who you may be, do not flatter yourself that your devotion will help you; do not depend on the protection of Mary; give up that foolish idea, "I shall have peace;" I love, praise, and honor the Mother of God every day, and therefore I have nothing to fear. I have a prayer in my book which has a revelation concerning it to the effect that no one who says it constantly will die an unhappy death, so that I shall not be damned. Ah, you will find out that bye-and-bye! Prayers of that kind, as I have often told you, are mere deceits, no matter how devout they seem. The words are in themselves good and praiseworthy; but the assurance of a happy death for merely saying the prayer, and the revelation confirming it, are, believe me, only lies with which the devil ensnares simple souls. Pray as you will and as much as you can; if you do not change your sinful life, your devotion to the Mother of God, and all the hopes you place in it are alike false and presumptuous. Stick to your opinion that you will not be damned; I tell you that you will be damned in spite of your devotion, and will go to hell with the Blessed Virgin looking on and approving. I come now to the

### Second Part.

True, perfect love and devotion to the Mother of God consist in imitating her virtues.

Too long have I spent talking of those false servants, my dear brethren. My opinion of you is much better. You honor the Queen of heaven with a sincere devotion; your love for her is found in your pure hearts as well as on your lips; you show it by deeds as well as by words; but is it a zealous and perfect love, or only a weak and tepid affection? This latter is, I fear, the case with some even just souls. For perfect love and earnest desire to please another make a person always try to conform himself with the object of his affection, as experience shows. A lover is like an ape; he imitates all he sees and experiences in the loved one; what pleases the latter pleases him too; what

the latter cannot bear is a torture to him; if the one finds a thing good to eat, the other at least pretends to eat it with great relish, and often eats with pleasure, simply because the loved one presents it to him, what would otherwise cause him disgust. In a word, all the habits and manners of lovers are alike, as far as may be. Now, if perfect love requires this, have I not reason to fear that but few zealous lovers of the Mother of God are to be found? Ah, holy Virgin, how cold and tepid are my love and devotion to thee!

For where is our earnest zeal and diligence to resemble thee in all things? to imitate, as far as possible, thy virtues and habits? to make our lives copies of thine? But what am I talking about? The rosary is the tax we pay thee daily; we greet thee with an Ave when we hear the clock strike; on Saturdays we fast, or abstain, or light a candle in thy honor; when we see thy pictures we bow the head; on thy feast-days we go to confession and holy communion; our hearts are filled with confidence in thee in all our wants and necessities in which we call upon thee. These and similar things are almost the sole proofs we give of our love; in them our devotion consists, and he who performs them constantly thinks he does much to honor thee, and indeed what he does is good and praiseworthy. But where is the purity of soul? where the hatred and detestation of all deliberate, and even venial sin? For when we consider thy conception and the whole course of thy life, we cannot find the least stain or shadow of sin. Where is our zeal in the divine service? For we see thee as yet a child of only three years of age, hastening to the temple, and offering thyself altogether to the service of thy Creator. Where is the true humility that we, to our great astonishment, remark in thee, O great Mother of the sovereign God! when in thy Annunciation we hear thee say the words: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord"? when in thy Visitation we see thee acting as the servant of mortals in the house of Elizabeth? Where is the reserve, simplicity, and modesty that shone in all thy demeanor, after the model of thy divine Son? For, through sheer wantonness and dissipation of spirit we hardly know how to do enough to conform to the outward show required of us by the vain world. Where is the carefulness with which we should fulfil the duties of our state, in order to imitate that wonderful obedience that made thee subject thyself, as an ordinary woman, to the severe and dishonoring law of purifica-

But very few, even of the just, do that; so that there are few who truly love the Mother of God.

tion? Where is the conformity and perfect resignation of our will to the will of God, that we should have to resemble thee, when with thy little Infant in thy arms thou didst set out in the dark night, at a single sign of the divine will, for the unknown and idolatrous land of Egypt, hardly aware of where thy journey would end? Where are the true patience and love of the cross? for we see thee, the Mother of sorrows, thy heart pierced with grief, standing under the cross of thy dying Son. Where is our contempt of earthly things, our ardent desire of heavenly goods? for we see thee in thy holy death breathing forth thy soul through sheer desire for heaven. Ah, we think seldom or never of those things! Alas! then have I hitherto without reason called myself thy faithful servant; for my acts and behavior often prove me to be the very opposite; a child unlike indeed to such a Mother! I know that no matter what I do I shall never attain to thy perfection; yet I should strive according to my means, and it is not impossible for me, to follow thee at least at a distance; I am, in fact, bound to do so if I wish to be looked on as having a true, childlike love for thee. For this you, too, my dear brethren, must strive if you wish to deserve the same name. True love for the Mother of God does not consist in outward works of devotion, nor in the mere movements of the heart, but in the diligent imitation of her most holy life. "If you love Mary," says St. Bernard, "if you wish to please her, imitate her." St. Augustine, writing of the feast we celebrate to-day, agrees with him, and says: "Let us all recommend ourselves to the intercession of the Virgin Mary, and implore her protection; but what will it profit us to beseech her by words if we do not follow the example of her humility?"

Answer to  
an objec-  
tion.

Yes, some one will say, if all this is required to be a child of Mary, what need have we of her protection? To what end a great love for and devotion to her? For if I keep from grievous sin, if I always lead a good and pious life, then I shall get to heaven without her help. Eh! and why then do you not draw this conclusion also: if all those things are required to make a true servant of God, what do I want with the help of God? Why should I stand in need of His grace? For if I always lead a holy and pious life, I shall go to heaven without His help and assistance, since the God of truth has promised that reward to him who lives holily. I hardly think you will go so far in your

<sup>1</sup> Si Mariam diligitis, si vultis ei placere, æmulamini.

reasoning, for you know well that the grace and help of God are necessary to enable you to live in that manner. And that is the answer I make to your objection; to keep free from sin and lead a good and virtuous life, you stand in need of the help and intercession of Mary, without whom God has determined not to give any grace. And if you now live holily, do you know that you will persevere in virtue? Is it not possible for you to fall through weakness, or the surprise of a violent temptation, or in some sudden occasion? Are you not then in need of a refuge to help you to rise again after your fall? This you will find in the Mother of God, who will help her child to repent sincerely. And if you have never sinned in your whole life, are you sure of the final grace of a happy death, that God has promised to no one? See where your Mother can help you, and she will not allow her child to be lost forever.

Oh, more than happy then is he who loves Mary honestly, truly, and zealously! He has, as it were, a written document to show that he is in the number of those whom God has resolved to make happy with Himself in heaven, as all the holy Fathers teach, and as I shall prove in detail on another occasion. O sinners! change your false devotion into a true one! Renounce that secret hatred with which you persecute that holy Virgin and her divine Son by your sins; lay it aside if you do not wish to cheat yourselves! Yet if any one on account of the proximate occasion in which he is, or of inveterate habit, or violent passion and inclination is a slave to sin, as it were by violence, and serves it as he would a tyrant, then I beg of him not to omit his usual prayers and devotion to this most holy Virgin. For although his homage comes from an unclean heart, it is not altogether unprofitable, nor is his state a desperate one. Cease not, although you groan under the weight of your sins, to send forth to her daily with the Catholic Church the sigh for help, "Help me, who am falling."<sup>1</sup> O Mary! I know that I am in an unhappy and a dangerous state; I cannot overcome myself and free myself from it. Help me then, O powerful Mother! Obtain for me from thy divine Son the grace to enable me to change my disposition, to overcome this habit, this violent inclination, to free myself from this occasion, and to rise again to penance, to friendship with God, to the life of grace! This prayer may still help to obtain the grace of true devotion.

Exhortation  
to sinners to  
pray to  
Mary for the  
grace of  
repentance.

<sup>1</sup> *Succurre cadenti.*

Resolution  
of the just to  
love Mary  
sincerely.

But as for ourselves, my dear brethren, let us love Mary more and more, and love her always and constantly; and especially as children are apt to watch their mother and to imitate what they see in her, so let us endeavor, as far as we can, to follow the example of our heavenly Mother. Oh, yes, dearest Mother, what good reason I have to begin at last to do this! I must acknowledge that I am one of those presumptuous beings who have dared to make thee a cloak for their sins. Ah, do not therefore reject me from the number of thy children. I desire henceforth to remain in thy service, only that I may promote thy honor all the more in myself and in others. This shall be the object of all my daily prayers and devotions, so that thou mayest obtain for me a true, zealous, and perfect love for thee; that thou mayest increase it, and preserve it in me constantly to the end. Thus I shall live in the assured confidence of ascending one day to thee in heaven, where I shall see, praise, and love thee, my hope, my sweetness, my refuge, my life, for all eternity. Amen.

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### SIXTIETH SERMON.

#### ON THE FALSE HOPES OF HEAVEN OF THE SINNER WHO TRUSTS IN THE MERCY OF GOD.

##### Subject.

The presumption of which sinners are guilty in hoping for heaven because God is merciful is a sure sign of eternal reprobation: first, because it is a most outrageous act of contempt towards God; secondly, because God is, as it were, forced to condemn him who acts thus presumptuously.—*Preached on the third Sunday after Pentecost.*

##### Text.

*Hic peccatores recipit, et manducat cum illis.*—Luke xv. 2.  
“This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them.”

##### Introduction

There is the foundation on which sinners build their hopes of heaven. God is infinitely good, they say. God is merciful; His mercies are above all His works. Christ is the Friend of sinners; He receives them, He eats with them, He rejoices with

His angels when a sinner is saved. So that, after all, I can venture a little farther. For what have I to fear? I trust in the mercy of God, and I shall be saved. Of such people the Holy Ghost says by the wise Ecclesiastes: "There are wicked men who are as secure," as fearless and peaceful, "as though they had the deeds of the just."<sup>1</sup> But to live in sin and trust for salvation to the goodness of God is not by any means a firm hope, but rather a rash presumption; it is not a sign of predestination to heaven, but rather of eternal reprobation, as I shall now prove, to inspire the wicked with a salutary fear that they may amend in time, if they wish to have the consolation of a firm hope of salvation.

#### Plan of Discourse.

*The presumption of which sinners are guilty in hoping for heaven because God is merciful is a sure sign of eternal reprobation, because it is a most outrageous act of contempt towards God; as we shall see in the first part. This presumptuous hope of the wicked is a sure sign of reprobation, because God is, as it were, forced to damn those who act thus presumptuously; this we shall see in the second part.*

God of mercy and justice! move the hearts of all sinners with Thy salutary fear, that they may return to Thee; give us all Thy powerful grace to serve Thee faithfully and constantly, and to have a well-grounded hope in Thy mercy. This we beg of Thee through the intercession of our dear Mother and our holy guardian angels.

Of all the divine perfections, although they are all infinite and boundless, there is none that the great God has shown more frequently to His creatures, none that He wishes them to honor and praise more than His goodness and mercy. "The Lord is gracious and merciful, patient and plenteous in mercy. The Lord is sweet to all, and His tender mercies are over all His works;"<sup>2</sup> so says the Prophet David, and experience shows that he speaks the truth. Now, if it causes one the greatest pain and sorrow to see that attacked and injured which he thinks most of, it follows that no greater insult or injury can be offered the Almighty than wantonly to dishonor and despise His goodness and mercy. What St. Paul finds hardest to understand in

It is offering a great insult to God to dishonor and offend His goodness and mercy.

<sup>1</sup> Sunt impii, qui ita securi sunt, quasi justorum facta habeant.—Eccles. viii. 14.

<sup>2</sup> Misericors et misericors Dominus patiens et multum misericors. Suavis Dominus universis, et miserationes ejus super omnia opera ejus.—Ps. cxliv. 8, 9.

the wickedness of sinners is that they go so far as to despise the goodness of God by their sins. "Despisest thou the riches of His goodness, and patience, and long-suffering?"<sup>1</sup>

That is done  
by those  
who sin,  
and trust in  
the mercy  
of God.

Ah, holy Apostle, hast thou not found that to be the case during thy lifetime? And now it is only too frequent. You, O presumptuous man! who place your hopes of salvation in God and yet persist in sin: you are the wretch who not only embitter and despise that great Lord, who is infinite goodness and mercy, and treat Him with a contempt common to every sin, but moreover you insult and despise Him (I can hardly speak of it without shuddering) for the very reason that He is so good and merciful; and if He were not so good, you would abstain from sin. For, answer me this question: you know well that this unchaste pleasure, this impure love and unlawful intimacy, this injustice, this hatred against your neighbor, this habit of drunkenness, this swearing and cursing, in a word, all the sins that you commit without any effort to amend or repent, or that you intend to commit in the future, you know that they are all expressly forbidden by the great God under pain of hell-fire. Why then are you not afraid to commit them, or to persist in them any longer?

For they  
offend God  
precisely  
because He  
is good.

You have an enemy who has grievously offended you, and on whom you would wish to be revenged if you had the chance; but he is too strong for you; see, there he goes across the marketplace; run after him at once, fall upon him, and let him feel the effects of your anger! No, no, you say, I must not think of that. Why? Because he is much stronger than I; he is not likely to let me off easily; I know him well, and am sure that if it came to blows I should be the worst off. In that case you act prudently to let him alone. But have you no hesitation in attacking and offending your God, who has never done anything to injure you, but has always been your Benefactor? Why is that? Is He perhaps weaker than you, so that you can rely on your strength in provoking Him? Can you go anywhere to escape Him, so that you may take refuge in flight? Can He not hurl you into hell amongst the demons, in the very place, at the very moment in which you insult Him? If you knew that such would be the consequence of the first sin you commit, nay, if you were certain that on entering into that forbidden house you would break your leg, or that at the first impure glance you would be-

<sup>1</sup> An divitias bonitatis ejus, et patientiæ, et longanimitatis contemnitis?—Rom. ii. 4.



come blind, or at the first scandalous discourse, deaf and dumb, or that you would fall down dead after the first sin, would you still resolve to commit it, or even entertain the thought of it for a moment? No, you say, I would not be so foolish, no matter how strong my inclination, how violent my passion; I would not buy a short-lived pleasure at such a price. And what makes you now so daring that you do not fear to heap sin on sin? Is it not because you believe, hope, and trust that God will not punish you, that He will not send you to hell, but will forgive you your sins as He has already done for so many? You are like the wicked man of whom St. Augustine speaks: "Behold," you say, "I did it yesterday, and God spared me; I do it to-day, and God spares me; I shall do it to-morrow because God spares."<sup>1</sup> But what sort of a foundation is that for you to build your belief, hope, and confidence on, that He will spare you in the future? Because, you answer in thought, God is a good, patient, merciful Father, who is easily appeased, and easily persuaded to admit the sinner to His friendship; a humble repentance can make everything right with Him again; this I have often experienced; and I hope that He will not abandon me in future, because His mercy is infinitely greater than all the sins of the world are grievous. Therefore you sin because God is good and merciful? "Therefore," concludes St. Augustine, "because God is good, you are bad, and you despise the riches of His goodness and patience."<sup>2</sup>

But what a vile, outrageous, and devilish conclusion you come to! God is good, God is merciful, God has pardoned me, God will pardon me, God will not reject me forever, God will bring me to Himself in heaven, therefore I need not fear; I can venture to go on farther, and to offend and insult Him without anxiety. Is not that the same as if I were to say to you: see, there is a good man who has never injured any one; let us go and beat him soundly? For shame! "Let no one think," says Tertullian, "that the way to sin lies open to him because the way of repentance is not closed; let no one become wicked because God is better."<sup>3</sup> If you have any sense of uprightness left, you

That is  
most vile  
conduct.

<sup>1</sup> Ecce feci heri, et pepercit Deus; facio hodie, et parcit Deus; faciam et cras quia parcit Deus.—S. Aug. in Ps. c.

<sup>2</sup> Ergo quia Deus bonus est, ideo tu malus es, et divitias bonitatis ejus, et patientiæ contemnis.

<sup>3</sup> Absit ut aliquis ita interpretetur, quasi sibi pateat ad delinquendum via, quia patet ad poenitendum. Nemo idcirco sit malus, quia Deus est melior.

should reasonably draw quite a different conclusion, and say: God is good, therefore I too must be good, and better than I have been hitherto. God is good, and has borne with me very patiently up to this, although He could long ago have sent me to hell for my sins; therefore I will no more offend such a merciful Lord. God is good and ready, if I do penance, to admit me again into His friendship; therefore I will no longer defer repentance, but will return to Him at once. God is good and I trust that He will make me eternally happy; therefore He well deserves that I should serve, honor, and love Him with the utmost zeal. God is good, and does good even to those who provoke Him to anger, as I know by experience; therefore it is a twofold, inexcusable, and most fearful sin to despise and offend such goodness; nay, it is inhuman malice to condemn Him because He is good. Who ever heard of a people so barbarous as to hate a man because he is most amiable? to dishonor and do harm to him because one has received benefits from him, and hopes to receive more in future?

Because they hate God for the very reason that should make them love Him. Shown by an example from Scripture.

Bitter and vindictive as Saul was against David, whom he persecuted most cruelly, yet his heart was softened and his eyes overflowed with tears when he heard that David, into whose hands he had fallen, had spared his life, as we read in the First Book of Kings. In the midst of the persecution Saul went quite alone into a cave in which David was concealed with some of his soldiers; although the occasion was a favorable one for getting rid of an implacable enemy, David did not profit by it, but allowed Saul to go away unharmed, followed him, and cried out after him: "My lord, the king. . . Behold, this day thy eyes have seen;" see what a bad opinion you had of me, as if I were attempting your life; "behold, this day thy eyes have seen that the Lord hath delivered thee into my hand, in the cave; . . but my eye hath spared thee. Reflect and see that there is no evil in my hand, nor iniquity, neither have I sinned against thee, but thou liest in wait for my life, to take it away." Saul was much moved at this and began to weep bitterly: "Saul lifted up his voice, and wept, and he said to David: Thou art more just than I, for thou hast done good to me, and I have rewarded thee with evil."<sup>1</sup> Thus a good action brought an embittered

<sup>1</sup> Domine mi rex. . . ecce hodie viderunt oculi tui, quod tradiderit te Dominus in manu mea in spelunca . . . sed pepercit tibi oculus meus. Animadvertite et vide, quoniam non est in manu mea malum neque iniquitas, neque peccavi in te; tu autem insidiaris animæ

and raucous heart to better thoughts. But you, O presumptuous sinner! do quite the contrary. Your God has had you, His enemy and persecutor, in His hands, with full power to take your life and send you to hell for all eternity, as often as you were in the state of mortal sin; and yet He allowed you to go unharmed, without doing the least thing to hurt you. Should not that goodness of His move you to heartfelt sorrow, to bewail your crimes with hot tears, and to love most tenderly such a merciful God? But what do you do meanwhile? This very goodness of God you abuse as an encouragement to sin all the more freely. "Thou art more just than I," you say to Him by your actions and your presumptuous hope; Thou art a good Lord; I have done evil to Thee, while Thou hast done good to and showered benefits on me; I trust still farther to this goodness of Thine, and hope Thou wilt not allow me to be lost forever; and since I now have this knowledge and hope, I will sin all the more recklessly against Thy commandments, and satisfy all my passions and evil inclinations.

See, O God, the manner in which we mortals act towards Thee! Thou art good, and infinitely good to us, and therefore art desirous to attract us in a sweet, gentle manner to Thy service through love; and from that very goodness we take occasion to offend Thee all the more! If I myself were not amongst the number of sinners, if I too were not in need of Thy goodness and mercy, perhaps I might think that it would be more for Thy honor if Thou wert not so good, nor patient, nor merciful in Thy dealings with us. For if Thou wert stricter, Thou wouldst not be offended so often, so daringly, so grievously, especially by those who presume on Thy mercy. With reason does Tertullian say: the patience, goodness, and long-suffering of God are useful and necessary to men; but, so to speak, they are derogatory to God. If one has a good servant, he takes care of him and feeds him well. Why? Because he is a good servant. A good horse is well looked after in the stable. Why? Because it is a good horse. One does not willingly lose a good dog. Why? Because it is a good one. Thus there is nothing in the world that is not prized and valued if it is good. But Thou alone, O great God! art an exception to this rule; for Thou art valued all the less

Further explanation of this villainess and injustice.

*mea ut auferas eam. Levavit Saul vocem suam et flevit, dixitque ad David: justior es tu, quam ego: tu enim tribuisti mihi bona, ego autem reddidi tibi mala.*—I. Kings xxiv. 9, 11, 12, 17, 18.

because Thou art good! Everything in the world that is known to be good is loved; but Thou, O God! art loved all the less, because Thou art the best of all! We do nothing to injure one who is good to us; but we despise, annoy, embitter Thee, O God! without fear, for the very reason that Thou art good, patient, merciful, long-suffering in bearing insults, and because Thou returnest good for evil!

Thus these  
sinners in-  
sult God  
most gross-  
ly.

Could we offer the divine heart a keener slight than this? Hear how the Lord complains of it by the Prophet David: "The wicked have wrought upon My back; they have lengthened their iniquity."<sup>1</sup> Cardinal Hugo, explaining this text, says, that by the back we are to understand the patience and mercy of God; for as with men when they have to carry a heavy load the back must have most patience, so also it is the goodness and mercy of God that feels most keenly the burden of our sins. Therefore He complains: "The wicked have wrought upon My back." As if to say: I do not, so to speak, feel so much the fact of their offending Me, as that they take courage from and trust to the goodness and patience with which I bear their sins. "A grievous crime indeed," cries out St. John Chrysostom, considering this, "a grievous crime, to make the mercy of God an accomplice of the devil!"<sup>2</sup> When buyer and seller make a bargain in a public place, there is generally some arbitrator present to arrange matters and fix on a moderate price, and when both parties are satisfied, the bargain is concluded; in the same manner people go to work in marriage contracts, and betrothals, and in everything on which much depends. The hellish foe directs all his craft and cunning to the one object of driving a shameful bargain, making a disgraceful marriage contract and betrothal with our souls; the sole object of his most eager wish and desire is to get possession of this good which will last for eternity. But many a soul, enlightened by faith, often refuses to enter into this contract and to subject itself to the will and power of such a cruel and crafty master, and meets his offer with these words: I wish to be happy forever, and to live for eternity with God in heaven. How does the cunning foe go to work in such a case? He dares to use the mercy of God as an arbitrator and go-between, and in order to persuade the soul, speaks to it in the fol-

<sup>1</sup> *Supra dorsum meum fabricaverunt peccatores: prolongaverunt iniquitatem suam.—Ps. cxxviii. 3.*

<sup>2</sup> *Immane flagitium misericordiam Dei facere lenam diaboli!*

lowing terms: Sell yourself to me for this carnal pleasure, for this temporal gain, for this post of honor, for the sake of being revenged on your enemies, etc. You need not have the least doubt that the infinite mercy of God will release you and set you free again; it will bear with you for a long time, and then receive you back with joy, and make you eternally happy in spite of all. In this way many allow themselves to be persuaded, and sell their souls to the devil, by presumptuously trusting in the divine mercy to sin all the more freely. Truly, I repeat with St. Chrysostom, it is an enormous crime to make the divine mercy an accomplice of the devil! Most abominable is the sin of him who runs into hell and the hands of the devil, over the most loving heart of God, and His infinite goodness and mercy, which he tramples under foot!

Truly, my dear brethren, to sin because we know that God is good and merciful, and that He will act kindly towards us, is an insult to God, a malice than which none greater can be found among men or demons. If a man sins sometimes through weakness or surprise of temptation, or through being in the occasion of sin, or through violence of passion that he cannot resist without the utmost difficulty, and fears and trembles in his uneasy conscience the moment the sin is committed, he has indeed done wrong, but he seems to be in some degree to be borne with. Why? Because he has given signs of an honorable disposition; he knows that he has offended God, and that knowledge fills him with fear and terror. If a man sins through despair of the mercy of God, like Cain and Judas, and says to himself: "My iniquity is greater than that I may deserve pardon,"<sup>1</sup> that is indeed one of the most grievous sins, and yet to my mind it is not so bad and terrible as presumption. Why? Because the despairing man has still some respect and awe for the infinite holiness and strict justice of God; and he acknowledges his own wickedness, which he imagines to be so great that he cannot be pardoned. The demons in hell and all the reprobate curse and blaspheme God—a terrible sin! Yet I can easily understand it. Why? Because they experience nothing from God but the rigors of His justice; they have nothing to expect from Him for all eternity but to feel the weight of His chastising hand; they have no share in the goodness and mercy of God, and no hope of any alleviation of their torments, not to speak of salvation.

And dishon-  
or Him  
more than  
all other  
sinners.

<sup>1</sup> Major est iniquitas mea, quam ut veniam merear.—Gen. iv. 13.

But you, presumptuous man, do what no other sinner in the world, what none of the reprobate in hell, and not even the demons do: you sin and insult God precisely because He is so good to you; precisely because you console yourself with the hope of His mercy, and because you flatter yourself that you will be happy with Him for all eternity. All the others fear and honor something in God, namely, the rigor of His justice; but you show Him not the slightest honor. You love Him not; you fear Him not; you respect neither His omnipresence, for you sin before His face; nor His almighty power, for you think that it will do you no harm; nor His holiness, which you dishonor; nor His justice, which you imagine you need not fear; nor His mercy, from which you take occasion to sin all the more freely. Thus, as the pious Christian, according to what we have seen on a former occasion, who abandons himself with childlike confidence to God, honors and praises all the divine perfections at once, so by your presumption all those perfections are at once insulted and dishonored.

Hence they  
can have no  
hope of  
heaven.

Now if you have any common sense left, you can see for yourself whether your manner of acting towards God, whether the presumption with which you treat Him is likely to move Him to show you His mercy and to give you at the hour of death a special, extraordinary grace that He is bound to give to no one, and thus to place you among the small number of the elect, and to make you eternally happy. How could you expect such a favor? And where would you dare to go to seek it? If you have offended the justice of God, you have still a refuge left in His mercy; but if you attack that and insult it, where will you fly for help? "Who," asks St. Basil, "will free you and release you from such great evils? Will that God whom you have despised?"<sup>1</sup> Will that great God, whose warnings, threats, promises, patience, and long-suffering you have trampled under foot? in whom there is nothing that is not against you, that you have not made your sworn enemy? And if God is gracious to such a sinner, on whom then will He ever pour out the vials of His anger? Wicked as you are, I believe that God would rather give you the grace to prophesy future events, to heal all sorts of diseases, and to raise the dead; for even Judas worked miracles, and was damned at last in spite of them. But the grace of perseverance, of a happy death, of eternal salvation is not for

<sup>1</sup> Quis te eximet, ac ex tantis malis eripiet? Deus ne ille, quem contempnisti?

the sinner who presumptuously trusts in the mercy of God in the midst of his wickedness; to expect it under such circumstances would be to expect that God will not punish our vices, and that too on the day on which He will let sinners feel the weight of His indignation and strict justice. Ah, be not too sure! trust not too much in your presumptuous hope! do not sin because God is good! Believe me, no matter how good He is, He will put your false thoughts to shame on account of the intolerable insult, injury, and scorn that they offer Him. And this He will be, so to speak, forced to do, as we shall see in the

### Second Part.

God, I repeat, will, as it were, be forced to condemn the presumptuous sinner. Why? That is required of Him by His honor. His fidelity, His pledged word. His honor requires it. I call on the generally-received opinion of all sensible men to witness the truth of this. If a man, I do not say of noble birth and high standing, but any private individual of respectability, is insulted and ill-treated without cause, if he is of a meek and gentle disposition he will say nothing about the offence for the first or second time, although he may be able to defend himself. But if he sees that his meekness and patience only encourage the other to insult him more boldly, then he says to himself: I cannot stand that; I must show him that I can take my own part; that I am not a child, or a fool, whom any one can vex as he pleases, and from whom one has nothing to fear. Otherwise people will look on me as an idiot whom they can treat as they wish. And what else have the vindictive on their lips and in their hearts but their honor? They try to excuse the sins they commit by saying: my honor was concerned in the matter. What would they think, what would they say and do if vengeance was allowed them by the divine law? What do they not do when it is allowed them by lawful means? What do we take our God to be? What sort of an opinion have we of His patience and mercy? Have we to do with a dumb, senseless image? asks St. Bernard; with a wooden Jupiter, who holds a wooden thunder-bolt in his hand; whom one can treat as he pleases without having anything to fear? Is the goodness and mercy of God a blind, powerless thing, that can make no distinction between guilt and innocence? that deals in the same way with the shameless as with the honorable, modest, and weak sinner? that pays no at-

God is, so to say, forced to condemn those people, because His honor requires it.

tention as to who is worthy of it or not, and that serves only for the purpose of giving men courage to insult and despise it? "Be not deceived," says St. Paul, "God is not mocked."<sup>1</sup> We have to do indeed with a good, but at the same time a great, mighty, and just Lord, who will not allow us to befool Him. His mercy is infinitely great, but He has not entrusted it to the hands of any one to dispose of it at will, as those presumptuous people seem to suppose, who on the strength of that mercy sin without fear, as if they held in their hands a document from the Almighty promising to receive them again into His grace. Oh, no! "I will have mercy on whom I will," said the Lord to Moses, "and I will be merciful to whom it shall please Me."<sup>2</sup>

Which  
would suffer  
over  
the whole  
world if  
such people  
were generally  
saved.

And what would become of the public honor and glory of God in the world, if moved by that hope He granted the grace of a happy death, I will not say to all, but even to many of those presumptuous sinners, who would take any trouble to win heaven if one might live as he pleased, and if, generally speaking, nothing was required for salvation but a firm confidence in the goodness of God? What a vicious life the wicked would then lead! What scorn and ridicule infidels would heap on God! What scandal would be given to the innocent! What cause for murmurs and complaints to pious Christians when they see heaven cast before swine and dogs, that is, offered gratuitously to presumptuous sinners, while they themselves have to work so hard for it, and even in the midst of their holy endeavors are in constant fear and anguish of losing it, and have to say with the innocent Job, "I feared all my works, knowing that Thou didst not spare the offender;"<sup>3</sup> and meanwhile the others indulge their passions freely and without anxiety, and yet have a sure hope of gaining heaven? In that case religious in their convents might say: Why do we remain here? Why do we live in solitude? What is the use of all this fasting, prayer, constant mortification, and chastising of the flesh? God is good; He is merciful; if we hope in Him He will not condemn us, but even if we lead a vicious life, He will grant us the grace of a happy death; of this we can rest assured. Ah, try it, and see whether it will be so or not!

God is infinitely  
good.

Truly, I say again, God is good, and far better and more merciful than you, O presumptuous man! deserve or can imagine.

<sup>1</sup> Nolite errare : Deus non irridetur.—Gal. vi. 7.

<sup>2</sup> Miserebor cui voluero, et clemens ero, in quem mihi placuerit.—Exod. xxxiii. 19.

<sup>3</sup> Verebar omnia opera mea, sciens quod non parceres delinquenti.—Job ix. 28.



God is good, and if I did not know that already I should have reason enough for believing it from the fact that He has borne with you and me for such a long time, during which we shamefully abused His goodness. God is infinitely good and merciful in forgiving sin; but mark the force of that word, infinitely. It means that God could pardon an infinite number of sins; but it does not mean that He actually does pardon them. In the same way God is infinitely powerful, and could create an infinite number of worlds. Will He create them? No. Why? Because He does not wish. So that it is one thing to be able to forgive an infinite number of sins, and another actually to forgive them. If God were to pardon all sinners, none would be damned. So that God is good and infinitely merciful; but you must mark this and never forget it: this same good and merciful God is He who, in the beginning of the creation, hurled down to hell, out of heaven, the third part of the angels for one proud thought, without giving them a moment for repentance. You must know that the same merciful God, on account of a forbidden mouthful of fruit, sent so many miseries on the human race; and that this forbidden mouthful is the cause of the loss of so many souls. You must know that this merciful God is the same who allowed His own innocent Son to be so frightfully tormented, and to be nailed to the cross, and there cruelly murdered on account of the sins of others. You must know, above all, that this same merciful God is He who for all eternity will behold an immense number of souls burning in the brimstone and sulphur of the fiery lake of hell; and He will hear their moanings, and howlings, and gnashings of teeth without ever thinking of alleviating the sufferings of even one of them for a moment, without ever feeling the least movement of pity or compassion for them. And this should teach you, if you do not know it already, that you speak the truth whenever you say: God is infinitely good and merciful; but there is one thing you have left out, namely, that God is also infinitely just, and has a care for His honor and glory; that according to the measure of His mercy and patience in this life will also be the measure of His strict justice in death and in eternity; and that He will show especially to those presumptuous sinners who abuse His goodness only to offend Him with all the more daring and freedom.

Finally, if God were to leave His honor out of the question, He would still be bound to respect His fidelity, and His own

but also infinitely just in punishing sinners.

His fidelity requires

Him to  
punish  
them.

pledged word would compel Him to take vengeance on such sinners, and to make them feel the effects of His justice. But, you say, has not God promised His help, His special assistance in the hour of death, and the eternal joys of heaven to those who put their trust in Him? Yes; but to whom who thus hope has He made that promise, and in what manner should they hope? To those who with childlike confidence abandon themselves to Him with a hope well grounded on their own co-operation. "Ye that fear the Lord," says the wise Ecclesiasticus, "hope in Him; and mercy shall come to you for your delight."<sup>1</sup> "Trust in the Lord, and do good,"<sup>2</sup> says the Psalmist. "Serving the Lord," says St. Paul, "rejoicing in hope."<sup>3</sup> "His mercy is from generation unto generations," such are the joyful words of the Mother of God, "to them that fear Him;"<sup>4</sup> not, adds St. Augustine, to them that despise Him. But where is it written that God has promised to protect presumption? Search the Scripture through, and see if you will find a single passage in which God promises His grace and heaven to those who sin, trusting in His mercy. To your salutary fear you will find quite the contrary. "Knowest thou not," says St. Paul, "that the benignity of God leadeth thee to penance?" But if you pervert into an occasion of sin that which should serve for your amendment, then you must know that with your impenitent heart you heap up for yourself treasures of anger and wrath against the day of wrath, that is, against the day of your death. "But according to thy hardness and impenitent heart, thou treasurest up to thyself wrath, against the day of wrath and revelation of the just judgment of God."<sup>5</sup> This heaping and treasuring up, according to Paulinus, takes place when man, trusting to the mercy of God, heaps up a multitude of sins.<sup>6</sup> "Delay not to be converted to the Lord," is the warning given us by the Holy Ghost, "and defer it not from day to day; for His wrath shall come on a sudden, and in the time of vengeance He will destroy thee."<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Qui timetis Dominum, sperate in illum; et in oblationem veniet vobis misericordia.—Eccius. ii. 9.

<sup>2</sup> Spera in Domino et fac bonitatem.—Ps. xxxvi. 3.

<sup>3</sup> Domino servientes; spe gaudentes.—Rom. xii. 11, 12.

<sup>4</sup> Misericordia ejus a progenie in progenies timentibus eum.—Luke i. 50.

<sup>5</sup> Ignoras quoniam benignitas Dei ad poenitentiam te adducit? Secundum autem duritiam tuam et impenitens cor, thesaurizas tibi iram in die iræ, et revelationis justi judicii Dei.—Rom. ii. 4, 5.

<sup>6</sup> Cum de misericordia Dei sperans, congregat sibi multitudinem peccatorum.

<sup>7</sup> Non tardes converti ad Dominum, et ne differas de die in diem. Subito enim veniet ira illius, et in tempore vindictæ disperdet te.—Eccius. v. 8, 9.

“I called, and you refused;” I have had patience for a long time; I offered you My mercy in time, but you would not accept it; “I also will laugh in your destruction, and will mock.”<sup>1</sup> “You shall seek Me, and shall not find Me,”<sup>2</sup> but shall die in your sins. In a word, all who hope thus presumptuously are in the number of those sinners of whom the friend of Job says: “Their hope the abomination of the soul,”<sup>3</sup> and if speedy repentance does not follow, it will surely bring everlasting damnation in its train.

And now I arrive at this conclusion: Pious Christians who serve the Lord, who feel yourselves encouraged to constancy and fervor in the divine service, to a greater love of God, and to a spiritual joy in the Lord by the meditation of the goodness and mercy of God, to you I say with David: “Serve ye the Lord with gladness.”<sup>4</sup> “Delight in the Lord, and He will give thee the requests of thy heart. Commit thy way to the Lord, and trust in Him, and He will do it.”<sup>5</sup> Only continue to think often of the goodness of God, and to abandon yourselves to it with child-like confidence, and you can never hope enough, for your hope cannot equal the greatness of His mercy. And you too, O sinners! although you may have committed a million sins, if the contemplation of the divine mercy brings you to sorrow or repentance, as St. Paul says, and to a true amendment of life, then do not despair; return humbly to the right path; keep on saying: God is good; God is infinitely merciful, and therefore I am sorry from my heart that I have offended such a good God; and therefore I now make the firm resolution never again wilfully to offend such a loving Father. Only trust in the Lord; the sins you have committed, and now repent of, will never equal the greatness and the multitude of His mercies.

But you, on the other hand, presumptuous Christians, to whom the consideration of the divine mercy is only a spur to a wicked or tepid or more slothful life, an occasion of persisting in the state of sin, and deferring repentance from day to day, meanwhile adding to the catalogue of your crimes, you, I say, turn your thoughts in time to the other side, and consider the strict

Conclusion and exhortation to the good and penitent to hope in God.

To the presumptuous, to fear His justice.

<sup>1</sup> Vocavi et renuistis. Ego quoque in interitu vestro ridebo et subsannabo.—Prov. i. 24, 26.

<sup>2</sup> Queretis me et non invenietis.—John vii. 34.

<sup>3</sup> Spes illorum abominatio animæ.—Job xi. 20.

<sup>4</sup> Servite Domino in lætitia.—Ps. xcix. 2.

<sup>5</sup> Delectare in Domino; et dabit tibi petitiones cordis tui: revela Domino viam tuam, et spera in eo, et ipse faciet.—Ibid. xxvi. 4, 5.

justice of God, which will not allow itself to be played with. Think: it is God who will render to every one according to his works; who keeps in His anger till the day of wrath, when He will say to most men: "Depart from Me, you cursed, into everlasting fire;" therefore I beg of you to return to the merciful God!

To all  
others to  
fear Him  
and also  
hope in Him.

And all of you, whoever you may be, that you may not err by excess or defect, select the golden mean; hope and fear at the same time; fear sin; hope in the goodness of God. The fear of the divine justice should make you careful to avoid the occasions of sin, lest you should fall; the hope in the divine mercy should give you courage and comfort, that you may rise again immediately if you are so unlucky as to fall. Have you never remarked how a mother teaches her little one to walk? She stands it on its feet, and tells it to go on. Where is the mother meanwhile? She follows. Why does she not go on before? Because if the child saw its mother, it would not pay attention to its footsteps, and, through confidence and desire for the mother, would run after her without fear, and so on account of weakness would often fall. But if it sees that there is nothing before it because its mother is following, it walks much more cautiously, through fear, and if it totters, the mother is there to help it up. That is what the Prophet David teaches us when he speaks of the justice and fear of God: "Justice shall walk before him, and shall set his steps in the way;"<sup>1</sup> and of hope in Him: "And Thy mercy will follow me all the days of my life."<sup>2</sup> Therefore I, and you too, my dear brethren, should think: the justice of God shall go before me; for His fear will make me careful in the midst of so many occasions of sin. His mercy shall follow me; for the hope in it shall prevent me from despairing after sin, and shall encourage me to take refuge in that mercy, and to rise after a fall. But do Thou, O just and at the same time merciful God! give and preserve to us a childlike fear that may keep us from offending Thee, and a childlike hope and confidence in Thee that may encourage us in spite of all difficulties to persevere in Thy service and fervent love with a holy joy and pleasure. Amen.

<sup>1</sup> *Justitia ante eum ambulabit, et ponet in via gressus suos.*—Ps. lxxxiv. 14.

<sup>2</sup> *Et misericordia tua subsequetur me omnibus diebus vite mee.*—Ibid. xxii. 6.

# ON THE WELL-GROUNDED HOPES OF SALVATION OF THE PIOUS.

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## SIXTY-FIRST SERMON.

### ON THE CONSOLATION THE PIOUS HAVE BECAUSE THEY ARE ON THE RIGHT WAY TO HEAVEN.

#### Subject.

The pious Christian alone can rejoice in the present life: 1. Because he is on the right way to attain his end; 2. Because he has a star shining before, which assures him that he is on the right way.—*Preached on the feast of the Epiphany.*

#### Text.

*Videntes autem stellam gavisi sunt gaudio magno valde.*—  
Matt. ii. 10.

“And seeing the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.”

#### Introduction.

But do not rejoice too quickly! You are not yet where you wish to be! You must not sing the song of triumph before having gained the victory. You are indeed in search of a great Good, but you have not found it yet; you may now hope and desire, but you should not rejoice till you have found and actually hold what you seek. You have already once failed, and the same may happen to you again. Why then such great joy? “They rejoiced;” and that too with a great joy, nay, with an exceeding great joy. So might one have addressed the three wise kings when they left Herod in the city of Jerusalem, and went on farther in their search after Jesus, the Saviour of the world, whom they did not find there. And they might have answered:

Say what you will, we rejoice with an exceeding great joy. Why so? Because we again see our star shining before us, so that we have no need now to ask the way or to be fearful of having lost it; and if we are not yet in possession of what we seek, the star assures us that we are on the right way that will surely bring us where we want to be, and where we shall find the Child whom we seek. My dear brethren, the man who seeks God, and is certain that he is on the right way to find God, has truly reason to rejoice even in this life with an exceeding great joy. That is the case with you, O pious and just Christians! no matter how poor you may be in the eyes of the world; and you alone have reason thus to rejoice, as I now propose to show for the comfort of the good and the instruction of the wicked. I repeat:

#### Plan of Discourse.

*The pious Christian alone can rejoice with an exceeding great joy even in this life, because he is on the right way to attain his end; the first part. Because he has a star with him to assure him that he is on the right way; the second part. Therefore he who wishes to have true joy on earth must always keep on this way, if he is on it already, or otherwise he must seek it if he has lost it.*

For this twofold grace, and that we may have the joy that springs from it, we all turn the eyes of our mind to the star of the world, Mary, and to the lights of heaven, our holy angels.

It is a comfort for the traveller to know that he is on the right road.

The traveller who has a long journey before him to the place he wishes to reach in order to transact some weighty business on which much depends, can, as long as the journey lasts, have no greater comfort, joy, or pleasure than that which arises from the certainty that he is on the right road which will surely bring him to his goal. He may have many difficulties to encounter, many annoyances to put up with; he may have to be content with an uncomfortable inn, where he will find little to eat, and an uneasy couch at night; but in spite of all, he still preserves his good humor, and consoles himself with the thought: I do not belong to this place, and meanwhile I am getting nearer and nearer to the end of my journey; I am still on the right way, and all I have to do is to keep straight ahead. This consolation is much increased when he has with him some faithful, pleasant companion who is well acquainted with the road, and shortens it by agreeable conversation, giving him at the same time

the assurance that he is on the right way to his destination.

On the other hand, what a source of trouble it is to the traveller to be always in doubt, and to have to wander here and there without rightly knowing where his footsteps lead him? To be obliged to make one's way through a gloomy forest by different paths; to travel on until one is ready to fall down with fatigue and weariness, and withal to have to ask one's self: where am I going to? am I on the right way, or not? that is indeed a source of extreme discomfort. And how it grieves him, when, after having asked the way, he is told that he is altogether astray, that instead of going to the east, he has been travelling for hours to the west, and must now retrace his steps! For he has had much labor in vain that he might just as well have expended on attaining the true end of his journey.

But very  
annoying  
to be always  
in doubt  
about it.

Mark there, my dear brethren, the joyous consolation which the just and pious, and the just and pious alone have in this life; and on the other hand, the anxiety that torments the wicked, and the wicked alone, in spite of their apparent happiness. Who are we who live here on this earth? What are we doing here? We are all strangers and travellers on earth; we are only passing through it, as St. Paul says: "Pilgrims and strangers on the earth;" to whom earth is lent only for a short time, not given for eternity: "For we have not here a lasting city, but we seek one that is to come." Where have we come from, then? "We are absent from the Lord," says the Apostle; we have come from the Lord. Whither are we going to? Back to the same Lord. As the rivers come from the sea to pour themselves into it again, so all men have their origin from God as their Creator and first Cause, in order to return to God as their last end, and to be happy with Him forever. To no purpose do we live; in vain do we toil and labor, if we do not seek God, if we do not strive for God as the one object of our wishes. Let the human heart seek true repose, contentment, pleasure, wherever it will, it will never find them except in God alone. To possess Thee alone, O Lord! we are created; that we know to be true, and we acknowledge with Augustine: "Thou hast made us for Thyself, and our heart is uneasy until it rests in Thee." Not to attain to Thee is the

We men are  
on the way  
to heaven.

<sup>1</sup> Peregrini et hospites super terram.—Heb. xi. 13.

<sup>2</sup> Non enim habemus hic manentem civitatem, sed futuram inquirimus.—Ibid. xiii. 14.

<sup>3</sup> Peregrinamur a Domino.—II. Cor. v. 6.

<sup>4</sup> Fecisti nos ad te, et inquietum est cor nostrum, donec requiescat in te.

abyss of the most extreme misfortune; to attain to and possess Thee, the fulness of all imaginable happiness.

Hence it is  
a great  
comfort for  
a soul desirous  
of salvation to  
know that it  
is on the  
way to  
heaven.

What is there then to give man, as long as he is a traveller and pilgrim, true joy and true consolation, if such a thing is to be found on earth? Nothing can do so better than this thought: I am on the right way, which will assuredly lead me to heaven, to God, to my supreme Good. And what is that way? That of which David speaks when his heart is enlarged for happiness: "I have run the way of Thy commandments, when Thou didst enlarge my heart."<sup>1</sup> The way, namely, of the law of God, the way of virtue and justice, which you, O pious Christians! keep and walk on. It is truly a narrow and difficult way, one that requires much labor and toil to keep; but what does that matter to you? You do not belong to this world. Yet it is the true and direct way that leads to eternal life, which you desire to attain; it is the only way thither, and there is no other; and he who wishes to come to God must enter on and travel by it. "For they that work iniquity have not walked in His ways,"<sup>2</sup> says David in the same psalm.

Hence sinners  
can have no true  
comfort or  
repose.

What consolation then, or pleasure, can the wicked have in this life? They are subject to the same miseries and accidents as other men; they are banished into this vale of tears like all others; and at the same time they must know and say to themselves: I am going every day farther and farther from my last end; I am on the road that leads to eternal death; "the ends thereof lead to death."<sup>3</sup> Oh, what a wretched state to be in! What a terrible journey to make! Poor, sorrowing, sick, persecuted, but just Christians! do not complain as if you alone were unfortunate, as if you were the only ones whom God subjected to misery in this world! No; there are countless numbers who have more to suffer than you, who have far less pleasure in life than you. Let the wicked laugh and boast, and say: we are at the top of the wheel; we have a pleasant life of it; we eat, drink, dance, and amuse ourselves; that is the business of our lives; we seek and find all that delights the flesh and the senses; joy and pleasure is our portion on earth. But do not believe them; they are lying; what they say is not true. The joy and pleasure that are found outside of the way to heaven are only false and deceitful

<sup>1</sup> *Viam mandatorum tuorum cucurri, cum dilatasti cor meum.*—Ps. cxviii. 32.

<sup>2</sup> *Non enim qui operantur iniquitatem, in viis ejus ambulaverunt.*—Ibid. 3.

<sup>3</sup> *Novissima ejus ducunt ad mortem.*—Prov. xvi. 25.



delights; or they are a mere hypocrisy, an appearance of joy that shines outwardly, but leaves the heart filled with bitterness. St. John Chrysostom likens them to the poor, unhappy Israelites, who wept and mourned in the Babylonian captivity, far from the promised land, as we read in the one hundred and thirty-sixth psalm: "Upon the rivers of Babylon, there we sat and wept when we remembered Sion. On the willows in the midst thereof we hung up our instruments;" and all we could do was to weep and lament. Our masters tried to cheer us up, and to hear us singing joyous melodies. "For there they that led us into captivity required of us the words of songs: . . . Sing ye to us a hymn of the songs of Sion." Ah, we answered, how can we do that? "How shall we sing the song of the Lord in a strange land?"<sup>1</sup> How could we be joyous away from our fatherland? away from the right road, nay, away from all hope of reaching it? This, says St. Chrysostom, is a sketch of the miserable state of those who are not on the way to heaven: "Those who are slaves to sin and estranged from God ought to walk dumb and silent and to cease all music and song."<sup>2</sup>

For how is it possible for one to be truly joyous and happy who knows that all his happiness is in God, and at the same time must acknowledge that he is far away and estranged from God? How can he indulge in a hearty laugh who believes that his eternal welfare is in heaven, and yet goes farther and farther away from heaven? Who can rejoice who has nothing to fear so much and to avoid so much as the everlasting fire, the never-ending torments of hell, and yet knows that he is hourly going to hell with gigantic strides? "What pleasure can there be where there is so much fear, danger, and the apprehension of such great evils?"<sup>3</sup> The interpreters of Holy Writ are amazed with reason when they come to the nineteenth chapter of the Third Book of Kings, to read how the Prophet Elias could sleep calmly in the open field, although he was actually being sought for to be put to death by the raging and furious Jezebel: "He cast himself down, and slept in the shadow of the juniper-tree."

Since they know they are going away from heaven and to hell.

<sup>1</sup> Super flumina Babylonis illic sedimus et flevimus, cum recordaremur Sion. In salicibus in medio ejus suspendimus organa nostra. Illic interrogaverunt nos, qui captivos duxerunt nos, verba cantionum: hymnum cantate nobis de canticis Sion. Quomodo cantabimus canticum Domini in terra aliena?—Ps. cxxxvi. 1-4.

<sup>2</sup> Qui servi sunt peccati, et alienam a Deo vitam ducunt, muto clausoque ore esse debent, et omnia organa cantici suspendere.

<sup>3</sup> Quæ possit illic esse voluptas, ubi metus, ubi periculum, ubi tantorum malorum expectatio?

But that is, after all, not surprising; he was a holy man, whose conscience did not reproach him with any crime; all he could lose was his mortal life, and he had already begged of God to take it from him: "He requested for his soul that he might die, and said: It is enough for me, Lord; take away my soul."<sup>1</sup> I am far more astonished and terrified to think that a man who has a grievous sin on his soul can for even one moment laugh, sleep, rest himself, indulge in the festivities of shrove-tide, while he is actually on that most dangerous road on which the Almighty God, whom he has made his bitterest enemy, follows him step by step with the sword of wrath; on which the hellish furies surround him on all sides, while hell opens wide its jaws to swallow him up at once, and to sever him for eternity from God and from heaven. If the wicked had nothing on earth to torment them but this one thought: I am on the wrong way, and if I die now I shall be lost forever, it alone should suffice to show the truth of the mournful but vain lamentation of the reprobate in hell: "We wearied ourselves in the way of iniquity and destruction, and have walked through hard," troublous, and difficult "ways."<sup>2</sup>

But the good can rejoice in the thought, I am going to heaven.

How much more joyous, O Lord! is the life of Thy servants on the rude way of the cross! I must acknowledge with Thy Prophet: "Blessed," and more than blessed, "are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord. Blessed are they that search His testimonies, that seek Him with their whole heart."<sup>3</sup> They can laugh and rejoice with an easy mind; they can be joyous from the bottom of their hearts, "with an exceeding great joy." For what a consolation, what bliss it is to be able to think and say: I am on the right way, and as long as I walk on it I am sure that I love my God, and that God loves me! On that way I may walk, stand, sit, lie down, wake, sleep; at all times my God is with me—my truest Friend, my most loving Father, who protects me in danger, defends me from evil, takes special care of my body and soul; who arranges all that happens to me in this woful world for my greater good; who counts all my steps, marks down all my thoughts, words, and actions, reckons up all my sighs and tears, that He may give me an

<sup>1</sup> Projectque se et dormivit in umbra juniperi. Petivit animæ suæ ut moreretur, et ait: sufficit mihi Domine, tolle animam meam.—III. Kings xix. 5, 4.

<sup>2</sup> Lasciati sumus in via iniquitatis et perditionis, et ambulavimus vias difficiles.—Wis. v. 7.

<sup>3</sup> Beati immaculati in via qui ambulant in lege Domine. Beati qui scrutantur testimonia ejus, in toto corde exquirunt eum.—Ps. cxviii. 1, 2.

eternal reward for them. As long as I live and walk on that way I shall surely find what I seek and desire, namely, that same God, my only and sovereign Good; if I die on that way, no matter what the manner of my death may be, I shall certainly reach my longed-for fatherland, to which I am journeying, and where my inheritance shall be among the saints and elect in the eternal heaven of joys. Oh, what a comfort! It seems to the sinner and worldling as a mere fable and folly; but the servants of God know and experience how great and sweet it is.

Herein consists that agreeable repose of the soul that the Apostle calls "the peace of God, which surpasseth all understanding;"<sup>1</sup> a peace that far transcends all the senses and all the delights of sense that creatures can perceive. Thus a pious soul can say to himself: Although I am not in high esteem with the world, what does it matter to me? Vain honors are not what I seek, nor do they constitute my happiness. I may not have great riches; I may be poor and needy, and in want of many things, but why should I trouble about that? Money does not make the happiness that I have to seek in this journey of life. I may live in a poor place where I have many annoyances and mortifications to contend with, that come in my way in my efforts to keep the commandments of God amid all the dangers to which I am exposed; but what of that? Pleasures, delights, bodily comforts, are not the happiness that I have to seek in this, my earthly sojourn. What I do seek and desire, the sole object of my journey, is eternal happiness, an eternal crown of honor, an eternal treasury of wealth, an eternal abundance of joys, an eternal, infinite God, and in God an infinite Good that I possess when I love Him; and when I once have that Good, and do not wilfully cast it away, no man can take it from me. Wicked, unjust world! do what you can; you may take away my temporal goods by chicanery and deceit, but the chief Good that I seek you cannot deprive me of or steal from me. Impious and uncharitable tongues! talk as much as you will; you may lessen my good name before men, but you cannot take from me the favor of my God, nor lessen it in the least. Demons of hell! strain every nerve; rage, rave, and storm against me as long as you will; you may tempt and plague me, but it is not in your power to separate me from God, unless with my own consent. Although I am still a traveller, and see my fatherland only afar off; although

A greater  
consolation  
is not on  
earth.

<sup>1</sup> Pax Dei quæ exsuperat omnem sensum.—Philipp. iv. 7.

I have not yet secured possession of my God in heaven, for that I cannot hope for or expect as long as I am on earth, yet I am on the right way to it, and I am quite certain and assured that if I do not, of my own accord, turn aside, I shall reach heaven. There is nothing more for me to wish or hope for during the period of my earthly pilgrimage.

Hence God exhorts the good always to rejoice in the Lord.

Oh, my dear brethren, now I no longer wonder that in countless passages of Holy Writ the Almighty encourages, exhorts, commands, His pious and just servants to rejoice and be glad at all times, in all places and circumstances, although they are still in this vale of tears. "Be glad and rejoice."<sup>1</sup> "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say, rejoice."<sup>2</sup> "Serve ye the Lord with gladness. Come in before His presence with exceeding great joy,"<sup>3</sup> and so on. Howling, weeping, fear, and anxiety, of which I otherwise speak so often, belong to the wicked, who have made themselves My enemies, and who hurry on to their ruin on the road of sin; but you, My true servants and faithful friends, My dearest children, who love and serve Me, and live according to My law, "be glad and rejoice." Go on; you are on the right road; you are not very far from your reward, which will be exceeding great and abundant in heaven.

Especially as they are sure they are on the right way to heaven.

Yes, you say, that is a great comfort indeed; but how am I to know that I am one of the pious friends of God? that I am in the state of grace, and on the right way of justice and the observance of the commandments? The three holy kings saw the star before them, which by its light showed them the way, and made them sure of finding Jesus, the Saviour of the world. Where am I to find a star like that? Perhaps I am going astray while I imagine I am on the right road. Perhaps I am still on the way to hell while I flatter myself that I am getting nearer to heaven? I have often sinned grievously before now; can you furnish me with a document to show that my sins are forgiven? The judgment of men is a different thing from that of the almighty God, who found even His angels guilty of sin. Perhaps I am doing wrong when I think I am doing good. God pleases me; maybe I do not please Him. Is it not written: "Man knoweth not whether he be worthy of love or hatred"?<sup>4</sup> How then can I dare to trust in my having taken the right way, and

<sup>1</sup> Gaudete et exultate.—Matt. v. 12.

<sup>2</sup> Gaudete in Domino semper; iterum dico, gaudete.—Philipp. iv. 4.

<sup>3</sup> Servite Domino in lætitia; introite in conspectu ejus in exultatione.—Ps. xcix. 2.

<sup>4</sup> Nescit homo utrum amore an odio dignus sit.—Eccles. ix. 1.

to rejoice with an easy mind? And if I am now on the right road, how long shall I remain on it? May not the devil be a highwayman to rob me? How do I know what God intends to do with me? whether or not He has written my name in the Book of Life, among the elect? And have I not reason to fear that I shall be damned on account of my past many and grievous sins? Faith assures me that the number of the elect will be small, and that most people shall go to hell; have I not cause to fear that I shall be with the majority? No matter how I look at the matter, I cannot be sure of being saved at last. And with all this, how can I rejoice and be glad? Truly, my dear brethren, that objection seems a well-grounded and a difficult one. But away with all cowardly and unnecessary fear! That he who has the good will to serve God truly and constantly has no need to fear the devil on his way to heaven; that he has nothing to fear on account of past sins, many and grievous though they be, provided he has duly repented of and confessed them; that he has nothing to fear on account of the fewness of the elect; that he has nothing to fear on account of the uncertainty in which he is regarding his salvation: all this, if God grants me life and light so long, I will prove as occasion offers in the course of the present year. To-day let this be enough for our comfort, that we are on the right way to heaven. Yes, you say; but I do not know even that. But truly you do know it; you and all those who do their best to serve God piously have a bright star, a guide to assure you that you are in the state of grace, on the right way to reach God and heaven; and therefore, like the three holy kings, you may securely rejoice with exceeding great joy, as for your further consolation I now proceed to show in the

### Second Part.

It is true that God is a strict, all-seeing Judge, from whom nothing can be hidden: "Indeed, I know it is so," says the innocent Job, "and that man cannot be justified compared with God."<sup>1</sup> True it is, as Ecclesiastes says: "Man knoweth not whether he be worthy of love or hatred: but all things are kept uncertain for the time to come;"<sup>2</sup> that is, as the Council of Trent says, man does not know with an infallible certainty, such

The pious man can have a human certainty and assurance that he is in the grace of God.

<sup>1</sup> Vere scio quod ita sit, et quod non justificetur homo compositus Deo.—Job ix. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Nescit homo utrum amore an odio dignus sit; sed omnia in futurum servantur incerta.—Eccles. ix. 1 2.

as is required for an article of faith; thus no one on earth is as sure of being in the state of grace as he is sure, for instance, that Christ is really present in the Blessed Sacrament, for it is impossible for this latter not to be true; but that you or I should not be in the state of grace is not impossible, since we have no revelation from God regarding the matter. Nor can we have such a certainty about that matter as we have, for instance, that if we put our hand into the fire it will be burnt; for this latter consequence must inevitably follow, unless God by a miracle prevents the fire from working its usual effect, as He often has done. Nevertheless, even in this life, as theologians, with Father Francis Suarez, teach, one can have a positive assurance and certainty of being in the grace and friendship of God, an assurance that, humanly speaking, will not deceive him; that is, one that rarely fails him, and on which he can always rely firmly, so that he cannot have any reasonable cause for doubt. For example, that you may understand the thing more clearly: it is not impossible for the upper part of this pulpit to fall down and break my head, nor for the whole church to tumble to pieces and bury us all in its ruins; nor would a miracle be required to cause either of those events to happen, for they might arise from purely natural causes. And yet if I were to ascend the pulpit with fear and trembling, and keep looking up at the top to see if it is coming down on my head, or if one of you were to remain at home and never to venture into a church, or to hear Mass or a sermon, or otherwise while in the sacred edifice were continually anxious lest the roof should fall in, or the arches give way: would any of you look on either of us as being in his right senses? No; a fear of that kind is foolish and unreasonable. This church has stood a long time already; it shows no signs of decay in the foundations, no dangerous cracks in the arches, and hence I have no sound reason to fear that it will fall on me; I enter it therefore without the least fear or anxiety, for it is humanly certain that it will not fall. Similar to that is the assurance and certainty of the pious Christian that he is in reality leading a holy life, that he is in the state of grace before God, and on the right way to heaven; and that assurance he has from the sole testimony of his good conscience.

And this  
assurance is  
given him

For when a man who is earnestly minded to save his soul, to please God and do His holy will, as far as it is known to him, judges on reasonable grounds that he has no mortal sin on his

conscience which he has not already repented of and confessed; <sup>by his</sup> when, moreover, he is firmly resolved for the future not to com- <sup>conscience.</sup> mit a single mortal sin for any reason whatever, and has remained faithful to his resolution for some considerable time, keeping the commandments constantly, he may believe without any doubt that he stands well with God, and can rejoice therefore with all his heart. These are not my words; if they had no better authority you might refuse to credit them; but they are the words of the great St. Basil and other doctors of the Church. "You ask," he says, "how one can persuade a soul that it is free from sin?" And he answers: "If a man is in the same dispositions as David, who said: 'I have hated, abhorred iniquity;' if he can truly say: 'Not to me did the perverse heart cleave,' then without doubt he may believe himself free from sin." So speaks St. Basil. SS. Isidor, Bonaventure, and others speak to the same effect. On the same basis St. John founds the intimacy with which he dealt with the Almighty, and which he advises us also to use towards God: "If our heart do not reprehend us, we have confidence towards God,"<sup>1</sup> and know that we belong to Him. If, then, you wish to find out whether you are in the number of the pious who are on the right path to heaven, ask your own conscience in all sincerity, for you must not try to deceive yourself, whether it can reasonably and with truth maintain that it still holds hidden a mortal sin not yet confessed or repented of, or that a perverse heart still cleaves to it, that is, the desire to commit mortal sin; and if your conscience cannot show that either of these is true, then without doubt you may believe yourself free from sin. If a grievous sin lay on the conscience, it certainly would not be at rest, especially in one who is determined to love God and save his soul. Therefore if your conscience does not accuse you, be perfectly at rest; return your joyous thanks to the good God for the favor He has shown you, and beg of Him humbly, and at the same time confidently, to keep you on the right path always.

This, namely, the good conscience, is the star and guide that makes you sure of being on the right road; the Psalmist says of it: "Light is risen to the just, and joy to the right of <sup>What joy and comfort this testimony gives.</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Quæres qua ratione persuaderi possit animæ culpam, quod a peccatis sit libera? Si quis in seipso animi affectionem similem Davidi inesse animadvertit, apud quem est: iniquitatem odio habui et abominatus sum; si vere dicere possit: non adhæsit mihi cor prævum; tunc sine dubio credat se esse liberum a peccato.

<sup>2</sup> Si cor nostrum non reprehenderit nos, fiduciam habemus ad Deum.—I. John iii. 21.

Shown from  
the Fathers.

heart;"<sup>1</sup> and the Apostle, writing to the Romans: "The Spirit Himself giveth testimony to our spirit, that we are the sons of God."<sup>2</sup> Can any one in the world desire or wish for more for his peace, contentment, and true joy than the testimony that the just man always bears about with him, that he is a child of God, an heir to the kingdom of heaven? This alone was enough to fill St. Paul with joy in the midst of tribulations, pains, and persecutions, so that he boasts publicly before the world: "Our glory is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity of heart and sincerity of God, and not in carnal wisdom, but in the grace of God, we have conversed in this world."<sup>3</sup> All other things I consider as mere dirt; the only thing in which I set my honor, glory, and reputation is my good conscience. O happy joy of a holy conscience! exclaims St. Augustine. Thou art the soft pillow on which the soul may repose in security, with pleasure, without fear, in this stormy sea of the world, amidst the raging and tossing of the billows, and in spite of all the miseries of life. Thou art the paradise of joys into which the heavenly Bridegroom leads His spouse to show her what a sweet Lord He is, and what an agreeable consolation it is to serve God, to be in the friendship of God! Thou art a foretaste and sure pledge of heaven, in which there will be no other joy but to know God, to love God, and to rejoice in and with God! Rejoice, O soul! that art adorned with a good conscience; rejoice with a heavenly and eternal glory! So speak the holy Fathers of a good conscience.

Confirmed  
by the ex-  
perience of  
the good.

But what do the hearts of those who have already experienced and known this repose say of the matter? Ask the pious souls themselves, even those who are away from all worldly consolations, and who lead lives of the utmost severity that seem troublesome enough; ask them how things go with them. Gaily and cheerfully, they will answer; thanks be to God! all goes well; I am satisfied; I do not know what more I have to desire or wish for! O sinners! no matter how rich or powerful you are, how gorgeously you are clothed, how much you hunt after all kinds of pleasures, which of you can dare to say with truth: everything goes well with me; I am satisfied; I want nothing more?

<sup>1</sup> Lux orta est justo, et rectis corde lætitia.—Ps. xcvi. 11.

<sup>2</sup> Ipse Spiritus testimonium reddit spiritui nostro, quod sumus filii Dei.—Rom. viii. 16.

<sup>3</sup> Gloria nostra hæc est, testimonium conscientie nostræ, quod in simplicitate cordis, et sinceritate Dei, et non in sapientia carnali, sed in gratia Dei conversati sumus in hoc mundo.—II. Cor. i. 12.



Ah, bring all your imaginary joys and pile them in a heap; no pious servant of God, who is satisfied with his Creator, would change with you, or barter his repose of conscience for all your wealth and pleasures; nay, he would not give his austerities, his sighs and tears for all your delights. We sometimes see with heartfelt pity a soul that loves God shedding hot tears of sorrow for past sins; what, asks St. Chrysostom, do you think those are bitter tears? No; you are far astray; those tears are far sweeter than any laughter. "Those who have a good conscience feel and know what a comfort there is even in tears, fasting, mortification, and penance."<sup>1</sup> Now if weeping is as sweet as laughter on the way of the just; if pain itself brings joy and consolation to a good conscience, what are we to say of the delights and comfort that the good God, who never allows Himself to be surpassed by His creatures in generosity, gives abundantly even in this life to His true servants who seek Him? And if such exceeding great joy is to be found, even on the way to God, in this present pilgrimage, how indescribable must be the joy of the soul at the end of its journey, when it shall enter the heavenly country, after all the toil and labor is over, and behold for the first time the sovereign Good it sought so eagerly? when at its departure from this world the gates of heaven shall be opened to it and the angels will come out to meet it with the joyful invitation: "Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."<sup>2</sup>

Rejoice, then, just and pious Christians, with exceeding great joy! "Rejoice in the Lord always." You alone have cause to do so; you are on the right road to God; you have a star with you; you bear about with you everywhere your conscience that gives you infallible testimony that you are not gone astray. "Rejoice in the Lord always!" in all occurrences and circumstances, even in poverty, even in contempt, even in sickness, even in the most painful crosses and sufferings; for you have always this sweet thought to console you: I stand well with God; God is my Friend; I am a child of God; I am going to heaven if I only remain constant! The only thing you have to guard against most carefully is to lose the right path by committing sin; otherwise there is nothing in the world to disturb your repose of conscience, the only true joy that the soul can have in this life.

Exhortation  
to the just  
to keep al-  
ways on the  
right way.

<sup>1</sup> Quovis risu lacrymæ hæc sunt jucundiores. Sciunt qui lugent, quantum habeat etiam luctus voluptatem.

<sup>2</sup> Intra in gaudium Domini tui.—Matt. xxv. 21.

To sinners,  
that, seeing  
the misery  
of their  
state.

You, O sinners, on the other hand, you who are going astray on the paths of wickedness and hastening to your eternal ruin, how I pity and bewail your miserable, lamentable state, not merely on account of the hell you are hastening to, but also on account of the misery you suffer in this life. You will never persuade me that you lead a pleasant, peaceful, and quiet life. Laugh as much as you will; give to eyes, ears, taste, and sinful flesh all that can delight them; the soul, the heart, in which alone peace and contentment reside, and which in your case is tormented by the gnawing worm of conscience, cannot enjoy repose; and therefore you may not boast of true joy or pleasure. Oh, no! the troublesome guest you have admitted, even against your will, that is, your bad conscience, will not permit you to be happy; whether you like it or not, you must always hearken to its voice crying out to you: You have done evil; you are an enemy of God, a slave of the devil, a child of destruction, a victim for hell. No; until this sharp thorn is taken out of your foot, you must feel the inflammation and the pain it causes. As long as your conscience gnaws at you, you will seek in vain for perfect peace and joy. What do I say? Joy? You will have a hell on earth if you have a bad conscience, as St. Augustine says, who had experience of it before his conversion. Sinners! if you are not sunk in the very depths of vice, you must know how very bitter it is to have abandoned the Lord your God.

They may  
return to  
God.

Do you wish then to enjoy true peace of heart and real joy? Ah, then turn away at once from the path of sin to the way of the pious and just. Hear the loving words with which Christ invites you: "Come to Me, all you that labor and are burdened," and sigh under the heavy yoke of the devil, "and I will refresh you. Take up My yoke upon you, . . . and you shall find rest to your souls;" you will see and know that "My yoke is sweet, and My burden light."<sup>1</sup> It is not a heavy one, as you imagine; it is a sweet yoke, a light burden. Must not you yourselves acknowledge this? Tell me, is there any one of you who has before now truly repented of his sins and laid down the heavy burden of them by a good confession? If so, I ask him: how was it with you then, when, having received absolution, you left the church? Did you not experience a sudden change, a wonderfully sweet joy of heart? Oh, truly! You seemed to

<sup>1</sup> Venite ad me omnes qui laboratis et onerati estis, et ego reficiam vos. Tollite iugum meum super vos et invenietis requiem animabus vestris. Iugum enim meum suave est et onus meum leve.—Matt. xi. 28-30.

walk as lightly as if a heavy mill-stone had been lifted from your heart. And how soft and calm your sleep that night! Thus your own experience compels you to acknowledge that it is a far greater happiness to be freed from sin, and to be a servant, friend, and beloved child of God than to give a loose rein to your passions in the miserable state of sin and in the slavery of the devil. But if you have never had experience of this, then come, I beg of you, and give it a trial! Do penance sincerely, and learn how true it is that the just man can always rejoice with an exceeding great joy. "Oh, taste and see that the Lord is sweet."

Yes, O Lord! I believe it. I know what sweetness Thou hast prepared for those who love Thee with their whole hearts, and serve Thee alone! Did things ever go wrong with me when I kept by Thy side, and on the way of Thy commandments? If I were to say so, I should not speak the truth. Was I ever truly joyous or happy when I left Thee and Thy service? I should lie if I said so. If I ever spent a miserable hour, it was that in which my conscience reproached me, saying: you have made God your enemy! you have lost your soul, heaven, and all! Ah, I still bewail that unhappy time! I curse that pleasure, that good, the love of that person which led me into sin and separated me from my sovereign Good! In future nothing in the world shall be so dear to me as to bring me again into such misery! For where can I find perfect peace and joy of heart, unless in Thee alone, O God! the one object of my love? Thee shall I seek, and Thee alone shall I seek, and seek constantly. Let others strive for what pleases them, and find their joy where they will: "But I will rejoice in the Lord, and I will joy in God, my Jesus." In Him shall I place my honor, my riches, my hope, and my all. But I beg of Thee humbly with Thy servant David: "Perfect Thou my goings in Thy paths, that my footsteps be not moved;" that I may never leave the right way until, led by Thy grace, I shall have accomplished my journey, and arrived at the place where I shall find Thee, and rejoice with Thee with a great, an exceeding great joy. Amen.

Conclusion  
to serve God  
faithfully  
and to  
rejoice  
in Him.

<sup>1</sup> Gustate et videte quoniam suavis est Dominus.—Ps. xxxiii. 9.

<sup>2</sup> Ego autem in Domino gaudebo; et exultabo in Deo Jesu meo.—Habac. iii. 18.

<sup>3</sup> Perfice gressus meos in semitis tuis; ut non moveantur vestigia mea.—Ps. xvi. 5.

## SIXTY-SECOND SERMON.

## THAT THE DEVIL IS NOT TO BE FEARED ON THE WAY TO HEAVEN.

## Subject.

1. On the way to heaven we have no worse or greater enemy than the devil. 2. And yet if we are only firmly determined, there is no enemy we need fear less than the devil.—*Preached on the feast of St. Michael the Archangel.*

## Text.

*Factum est prælium magnum in cælo: Michael et angeli ejus præliabantur cum dracone.*—Apoc. xii. 7.

“And there was a great battle in heaven: Michael and his angels fought with the dragon.”

## Introduction.

What? Is then heaven, the dwelling-place of God, not free from those rebellious spirits? Have they then the audacity to attack their Almighty Creator and His heavenly princes? Alas! if so, how will it be with me, and other poor, weak mortals like me? You have misled us on that other occasion, when you told us always to rejoice and be glad in the Lord, because we are on the right road to heaven, and can with childlike confidence abandon the care of our salvation to the Providence of God. But how could you speak of rejoicing, as if the devil were not there to rob us of all? Such, pious servants of God, will probably be your thoughts. But I repeat again the words of St. Paul: “Rejoice in the Lord always; again, I say, rejoice.”<sup>1</sup> “Serve ye the Lord with gladness,”<sup>2</sup> and do not let the devil disturb you in this respect. And I mean to show in this sermon that you need not fear him.

## Plan of Discourse.

*It is true that we have no worse or greater enemy on the way to heaven than the devil; this I shall show in the first part.*

<sup>1</sup> Gaudete in Domino semper; iterum dico gaudete.—Philipp. iv. 4.

<sup>2</sup> Servite Domino in lætitia.—Ps. xcix. 2.

*And yet, if we are only firmly determined, there is no enemy on the way to heaven we need fear less than the devil, as we shall see in the second part. Let us only keep faithful to God with constancy and humility, such shall be the conclusion and the fruit of this sermon.*

Help us thereto by Thy grace, O Lord Jesus! through the intercession of Thy Mother Mary and of all the holy angels.

If we consider, on the one hand, what man is in himself, and, on the other, the devil as he is in himself, and set the two against one another in imagination, without helping the one, or hindering the other, then indeed we should have cause to tremble with fear, to give up all hope of salvation, for hardly one would gain heaven. For consider how unequal the two combatants are. The devil, embittered with an irreconcilable hatred towards the human race: man, careless and forgetful in the affair of his salvation; the devil, a daring and at the same time a powerful spirit: man, a cowardly, weak, miserable creature; the devil, a most crafty, cunning, and experienced deceiver: man, stupid and ignorant, who is easily and willingly deceived and duped. Alas! how could the latter dare to promise himself the victory! He could not entertain the least hope of it.

If God allowed the devil to have his way with men, hardly one would be saved.

In the first place, the envy and hatred of the devil towards men come from the fact that he, hurled from heaven by the Almighty, cannot bear to see man created by God to fill the places formerly occupied by himself and his companions in heaven. This fierce envy and hatred are constantly urging him to compass our ruin in every way possible. Our Lord, in the Gospel of St. John, calls him a murderer and ringleader of all murderers: "He was a murderer from the beginning;"<sup>1</sup> he goes about like a highway robber, nay, a public assassin, to hurl souls into eternal death; and the more of them he slays, the more bloodthirsty does he become, and his desire for slaughtering souls is whetted still more acutely. Theologians teach that for every soul condemned to hell the pains and torments of the devil receive an accidental increase for all eternity; yet his envy and hatred are so great that he prefers the increase of torment, as long as he can thereby bring man into the place of torture with himself. But he is not satisfied with bringing the souls of men to eternal ruin, and making them unhappy forever.

For the devil has the bitterest envy and hatred against men.

He cannot even bear to see their bodies enjoying a moderate

He acts

<sup>1</sup> Ille homicida erat ab initio.—John viii. 44.

cruelly to  
all whom he  
gets into his  
power.

degree of happiness, that now and then might come in their way lawfully during this life. How cruelly he acted towards the innocent Job when he was allowed to hurt his body! How he tortures and plagues the possessed, in whose bodies God has permitted him to dwell! Nay, his most intimate friends, witches and sorcerers, after they have signed with their blood a document giving themselves over to him forever, and he is thus sure of them for eternity, even they must in this life experience his rage and tyranny. Instead of a fancied pleasure that he impresses on their imaginations, he sometimes allows them no rest day or night; no despot in the world is so cruel to his slaves as the devil is to his sworn servants, as these latter have often confessed when put on their trial. In the unhappy times of heathenism he forced those who adored him as god and showed him the highest honor to sacrifice to him with their own hands their first-born and most beloved children, and to burn them alive, as I have on a former occasion shown by many examples. So great and bitter is his hatred against the human race, so insatiable his desire to bring all men to temporal as well as to eternal ruin.

He is very  
strong and  
daring.

“Vain is anger without strength,”<sup>1</sup> says the old proverb. But this hellish foe is not wanting in this particular. The prophet Job, who had had experience of his strength, says of him: “There is no power upon earth that can be compared with him who was made to fear no one.”<sup>2</sup> There are many men who would injure others if they only had the power; they have hatred and envy enough for the purpose, but they restrain their anger through fear of God or men. The pious dare not do it, because they fear to offend their Father who is in heaven; the imperfect are kept back by the fear of hell; the wicked restrain themselves lest they should be made amenable to the laws of the land, and be punished by them. Has the enemy of our soul any of these to fear? Not at all. His power to injure men has not its like on earth, and besides, he is so daring and malicious that he fears no one. He does not fear creatures, because the whole of them together are far weaker than he; he does not fear God; although he always feels the sword of divine vengeance, it cannot keep within bounds the rage he is always eager to pour forth on men every moment, without intermission. Therefore the apostle St. Paul warns us most earnestly: My dear brethren, he says, be on your guard, and

<sup>1</sup> Vanæ sine viribus iræ.

<sup>2</sup> Non est super terram potestas quæ comparatur ei, qui factus est ut nullum timeret.—Job xli. 24.

clothe yourselves with the fear of God: "Put you on the armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the deceits of the devil; for our wrestling is not against flesh and blood," that is, against men made up of weak flesh and blood, "but against principalities and powers, against the rulers of the world of this darkness;"<sup>1</sup> against the hellish spirits, whose power is far greater than any earthly might.

And finally, what is most of all to be feared in this enemy of souls, there is no one more crafty, subtle, or cunning than he. He is very subtle and crafty. Even if I have to deal with a powerful enemy, it does not matter much, provided I can find out when, how, where, and in what manner he means to attack me; for then I may seek help from some quarter or other, and defend myself as best I can; but if he falls upon me unawares, behind my back, like a thief or an assassin, or plants a dagger in my heart while professing friendship for me, what am I to do then? Who could protect himself against a foe of that kind? The devil is a robber and murderer when he tempts us. He is called in Holy Writ the old serpent, and we are warned to be on our guard against him: "That old serpent, who is called the devil and satan, who seduceth the whole world."<sup>2</sup> Why does the Scripture call him the old serpent? Would it not be more suitable to give him some other name; for instance, a fiery dragon, a roaring lion, a ravening wolf? No; these fierce animals we are apt to shun the moment we see them; but the crafty serpent manages to keep out of sight until the moment when it is about to spring on you; it does not approach in a straight line, but crawls along with a sinuous motion, concealing itself on the ground under grass and leaves, so that before one is aware of its approach it has given the deadly bite.

Such is the way in which the hellish serpent acts. He does not attack men openly in the beginning, with arms displayed, and violent demeanor, when he wishes to lead them into sin; he does not come straight towards us, but creeps along by hidden paths and circuitous ways; he acts with his suggestions as if he were our best friend and counsellor, although in truth he is inspiring evil under the appearance of good. He rarely proposes sins that He betrays souls by craft, as he tried to betray Christ

<sup>1</sup> Induite vos armaturam Dei, ut possitis stare adversus insidias diaboli; quoniam non est nobis collectatio adversus carnem et sanguinem; sed adversus principes et potestates, adversus mundi rectores tenebrarum harum.—Ephes. vi. 11, 12.

<sup>2</sup> Serpens antiquus, qui vocatur diabolus et satanas, qui seducit universum orbem.—Apoc. xii. 9.

are evidently grievous, unless to one whom he has already in his power, but uses all sorts of pretexts and excuses, says St. Chrysostom, with which he tries to make us believe that sins are lawful, nay, holy and necessary. We have in the Gospel a proof of his cunning. He wishes to tempt Our Lord to the sin of gluttony, that He might break His fast of forty days. How did he act? Did he bring food, and say: here, eat and fast no longer? No; he went to work far more cunningly than that. "Command that these stones be made bread," said he to Our Lord, apparently desiring Him to work a miracle. For, he thought, if the hungry man has bread in his hand, he will soon begin to eat of his own accord. In the same crafty manner he tried to excite in Our Lord the passions of vainglory and avarice, when he asked Him to let Himself down from the pinnacle of the temple, that the Scripture might be verified: "He hath given His angels charge over Thee, and in their hands shall they bear Thee up, lest perhaps Thou dash Thy foot against a stone." And again, when he showed Him from afar all the kingdoms of earth and their glory, and said: "All these will I give Thee."<sup>1</sup>

He does the same daily with most men.

The same cunning he uses nowadays against us mortals. For instance, if he desires to persuade a Catholic to break the law of fasting, how does he set to work? Does he say perhaps: go and eat meat! eat as much as you want in the evening; never mind the commandments of God? Not at all; but he puts forward various pretexts to excuse the person from fasting, pretexts that seem reasonable enough. Does he perhaps say to the insulted man: revenge yourself; do not forgive your enemy or say a kind word to him? No; but he puts forward all sorts of reasons to show that he must and cannot forgive; that his rights, his honor, his justice require, nay, that even the divine honor sometimes requires that he should not bear such an insult. Does he perhaps say to another: give no alms; do not go to church; remain away from the sermon; do not abolish that abuse? No; but he has a hundred excuses ready to help the man to form a false conscience; he is not bound to give alms; this or that custom is not bad; he must remain away from church, from the sermon, because his health requires a longer sleep, or the inclement weather might injure it. But the crafty spirit is far from suggesting those excuses to the same man, when the latter spends a great

<sup>1</sup> Dic ut lapides isti panes fiant. Quis angelis suis mandavit de te, et in manibus tollent te, ne forte offendas ad lapidem pedem tuum. Hæc omnia tibi dabo.—Matt. iv. 3, 6, 9.



part of the night, nay, sometimes the whole night, in gambling, drinking, dancing; then he does not want a long sleep. Nor does the man get so anxious about his health when he has to go out to some agreeable company; then the cold air cannot hurt him. This is a clear proof that the cunning tempter has deceived him. In the same way he betrays many under an appearance of piety, by persuading them, for instance, that they cannot go to the sermon, because they must prepare for confession and holy Communion, which are of more importance than the sermon, etc. Thus, although he has not actually led them into sin, he has at least succeeded in keeping them away from instructions and exhortations that would have benefited their souls, and helped materially to make them steadfastly pious. And so he acts in all other temptations.

Moreover, to bring out his cunning in clearer colors, he does not attack all men in the same manner; he knows well that the same bait will not bring every fish into his net; that one bait is required for a fish, another for a bird, another again for a wild animal. Therefore he studies the nature and qualities, the inclinations and passions of each one, finds out what passion is the most violent in each individual, and to foster this he directs all his suggestions and temptations. He leaves the avaricious man at rest as far as pleasures, gluttony, and drunkenness, vain pomp and gaudy apparel are concerned; but he instructs him in all sorts of tricks and dodges to make money. He does not plague the unchaste man with temptations to ambition; the bait he holds out to him consists rather of pleasant and dangerous company, agreeable objects, impure imaginations, occasions of sin, and so forth. He fills the mind of the proud man with thoughts of honorable offices and dignities, great exploits, reputation, a great name before the world. The simple-minded man he encourages to laziness, cowardice, inordinate sadness, which becomes the occasion of many sins. Another, who is otherwise not bad, he leads into the habit of excessive drinking, from which he knows that many sins will come. In the case of pious servants of God, he is satisfied if he can induce them to commit even a deliberate venial sin. "O most subtle cunning!"<sup>1</sup> cries out St. Leo. Who can be sufficiently on his guard against it, for he actually enlists our own nature and inclinations against us? Truly he does so! And hence the Apostle warns us in the

He has  
countless  
ways of be-  
traying  
men's souls.

<sup>1</sup> *subtilissemam astutiam!*

text already quoted: "Put you on the armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the deceits of the devil." He does not warn us against battles or combats that we have to sustain from the evil one, but against his insidious wiles and snares, that are more to be dreaded than all his power and cruelty.

So that we  
have no  
greater foe  
than the  
devil, and  
we must al-  
ways walk  
in humility  
and the fear  
of God.

Imagine now, my dear brethren, an enemy of that kind, fierce, embittered against us, daring and powerful, crafty, cunning, and treacherous, attacking a poor, weak, timid, ignorant, improvident man who is already naturally inclined to evil. Could there well be a greater inequality between the two sides? That enemy attacks that man to rob him of an eternal heaven, and to drag him down to everlasting flames; could the subject of contention be of more importance? And again: it is not merely one demon who struggles with one man, although one evil spirit is cunning and powerful enough to conquer and bring to ruin all the men on earth taken together. No; "our wrestling is against principalities and powers, against the rulers of the world of this darkness." They are powerful and great, and have a great army, says St. Thomas of Aquin. Whole armies of demons sometimes assail one soul. Oh, unhappy and lost mortals should we be if we were left to ourselves! Who should not fear? who should not tremble at the thought of such a terrible foe always lying in wait for us? And yet in such dangerous circumstances we do not hesitate to expose ourselves deliberately to be attacked, as I have shown elsewhere; we force our way wantonly into dangerous company and occasions; we throw wide open the doors of eyes, ears, and other senses; we place all sorts of dangerous objects before ourselves and others, as if we were invincible, and by our cursing and swearing we even call upon the devil and incite him against us. What wonder is it that most souls fall into the jaws of the hellish dragon, and only few gain heaven? Ah, Christians! we have good reason to be humble and to keep always in the fear of God; to pray without ceasing and implore the aid of our heavenly Father; "lead us not into temptation," that we may not lose Thy heaven, and become the prey of the hellish vulture!

Then we  
need not  
fear him.

If we do that, then I change my tone and say: pious Christians, who fear and love God, be not anxious, do not fear the devil. Cruel, strong, and crafty as he is, if he came against us with all the legions of hell, he cannot close the gates of heaven on us if we are determined to enter them, as we shall see in the

## Second Part.

First, we must know that the devil can tempt no man unless God allows him; nor can he tempt unless in the way permitted by God, nor for a longer time than God allows. If he were at liberty to deal with us as he wishes, then we should fare badly indeed; but his power is limited. "He is kept in prison," says St. Gregory, "because he is forbidden to tempt the just as much as he wishes." He is tied fast to a chain like a dog; he is confined in a dungeon, where he can storm and gnash his teeth through envy and the desire to injure us; but he is not allowed out until the door is opened to him, and his chain taken off; nor even then can he attack or vent his anger on any one, unless on the person and in the manner allowed by God. We read in the Gospel of St. Matthew that when Our Lord cast a legion of devils out of a poor man whom they possessed, they begged and prayed: "If Thou cast us out hence," and we have to leave this dwelling, "send us into the herd of swine."<sup>1</sup> Why did they wish to enter into the swine? That, says Theophilactus, they might teach us that no power is granted them even against such filthy animals as swine, unless with the divine permission. Much less, then, can they vent their anger on the image of God that we all bear about with us. Alas! how often the devil is called on in curses and imprecations to injure men! And how willingly, if God permitted, he would answer those calls, and kill and carry off with him to hell the person who curses, as well as him against whom the curse is uttered! But the good God has restrained his power. And that was the subject of the bitter complaint made to Pachomius by the hellish spirits: O unfortunate potentates that we are! they cried out; all our power is taken from us by the Crucified One! If we were permitted to act according to our wish and ability, we would in a short time overturn the whole world and fill hell with souls; but we are not allowed to attack all men, nor to put forth all our strength against any one. Mark, my dear brethren, the advantage we have against our hereditary foe. He may not attack us unless when and as God permits.

Again, God often gives him great liberty, but never to tempt a man above his strength. We have the assurance of that from St. Paul: "God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that which you are able, but will make also with temptation

The devil  
can tempt  
no one un-  
less when  
and how  
God per-  
mits.

God does  
not allow  
him to  
tempt men  
above their  
strength.

<sup>1</sup> *Si ejicis nos hinc, mitte nos in gregem porcorum.*—Matt. viii. 31.

issue, that you may be able to bear it,"<sup>1</sup> and to overcome it. He measures the temptation according to the strength of each one, like a loving father who sometimes covers the servant's head with a cloth in order to frighten his child; but if he sees the little one too much terrified, and beginning to shriek and cry out, he at once orders the disguised ghost to go away, and takes the child in his lap to console it.

He gives  
men angels  
to help them  
in tempta-  
tions.

And although God gives the devil permission to tempt man, yet He sends the latter such powerful help that he is in the end mightier and stronger than all the demons of hell. "Alas, alas, alas! my lord, what shall we do?" cried out the servant of the prophet Eliseus, full of fear and terror when the king of Syria was about to apprehend his master, and the servant saw the city besieged by soldiers and chariots. What are we to do? We are lost. By no means, answered Eliseus, calmly; what are you afraid of? Is it of the numerous enemies you see arrayed against us? But have courage; "fear not;" look up, and then he pointed to a high mountain filled with soldiers clad in brilliant armor, and driving with horses and chariots of fire to defend the prophet. "Fear not; for there are more with us than with them."<sup>2</sup> Who were the soldiers? They were angels from the host of heaven, whom God had sent to the help of His faithful servant. The same happens in the spiritual combat, says St. Thomas of Aquin; many demons sometimes violently attack a single soul; through fear of offending God it grows terrified, cowardly, and desponding at the abominable imaginations, blasphemous thoughts, impure ideas that God has permitted the evil spirit to suggest; but fear not, says the angelic doctor, if you are only firmly resolved to remain faithful to God: "Fear not; for there are more with us than with them." Far greater is the number of angels that hasten to your assistance than that of the demons that hell sends against you. "He hath given His angels charge over thee to keep thee in all thy ways;" and if you only accept their help, "in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone."<sup>3</sup> From this we can see what I have often reminded you of, my dear brethren,

<sup>1</sup> *Fidelis autem Deus est, qui non patietur vos tentari supra id quod potestis, sed faciet etiam cum tentatione proventum, ut possitis sustinere.*—1. Cor. x. 13.

<sup>2</sup> *Heu, heu, heu domine mi! quid faciemus? Noli timere; plures enim nobiscum sunt, quam cum illis.*—IV. Kings vi. 15, 16.

<sup>3</sup> *Angelis suis mandavit de te, ut custodiant te in omnibus viis tuis; in manibus portabunt te, ne forte offendas ad lapidem pedem tuum.*—Ps. xc. 11, 12.

the great reason we have to hold our holy guardian angels in high honor, and to call upon them in all temptations with child-like confidence; and my reason for mentioning the holy angels in the beginning of all my sermons is to keep this fresh in your minds.

But we have also on our side not only the angels, but the Lord of the angels, God Himself, if we are only united with Him, and humbly implore His assistance. God does not witness our combat as earthly princes sometimes do in the world when they look on at a tournament from a window of their palace; they see all that passes, and encourage the combatants, but give none of them any help to win the victory. The Almighty, on the other hand, is like an experienced general, who, while looking on at a battle, knows how to send help to his soldiers in their need. "He exhorts you to fight," says St. Chrysostom, "and He helps you to conquer." <sup>1</sup> "Servants of Christ! do not fear the ministers of Satan!" such are the words in which St. Cyprian exhorted the martyrs to endure their torments, and us to endure temptation: "for the Lord is stronger to protect than the devil to attack."<sup>2</sup> Servants of Christ, God is with us; God is in us; who can harm us if we do not accept the harm with our own free will? God fights for us; shall we then fear the devil and his temptations? What! fear? We should rather laugh at him, and treat him as the young David did the proud giant Goliath. This huge mountain of flesh came on armed with a heavy lance and began to revile David: "Come to me," he said, "and I will give thy flesh to the birds of the air and to the beasts of the earth." David, a poor shepherd boy, had no armor but his staff and sling; but he was as little discomposed as if he had to deal with a weak child. And where did he get such courage? Yes, he said to the giant: "Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield; but I come to thee in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel." I do not fear your huge size, for I have on my side a God who is greater than you, and in whose name I fight; your strength and your armor do not terrify me, for I have with me a mightier Lord, who will this day put your people to shame, and give them to the birds of prey. "The Lord will deliver thee into my hand, and I will slay thee, and take away thy head from thee: and I will give the carcasses of

God Himself helps us, so that we need not fear the devil.

<sup>1</sup> Hortatur ut pugnes, adjuvat ut vincas.

<sup>2</sup> Servi Christi, ne Satanas ministros pertimescatis! quia major est Dominus ad protegendum, quam diabolus ad impugnandum.—8. Cyp. de exhort. martyr. c. 10.

the army of the Philistines this day to the birds of the air and to the beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel.”<sup>1</sup> By Goliath we are to understand the devil, and by David a weak soul that is tempted and puts its confidence in the help of God: for it too can treat its enemy with scorn and say: “I come to thee in the name of the Lord of hosts;” I do not fear you, foul spirit, for you must know that God is with me to fight for me.

Shown by  
an example.

The Abbot Theodosius, before beginning the solitary life, was once brought in spirit to a vast battle-field, where a huge black-amoor, whose head seemed to reach the stars, advanced against him. Theodosius was terrified at the sight; he trembled over his whole body, and could hardly lift his feet to take to flight, and therefore he remained where he was, as he feared to move. A youth of amiable appearance who had brought him there encouraged him, saying: “As soon as you attack him, I will help you to gain the victory.” Hardly had I begun to take courage (in these terms the Abbot related the incident to his holy Father, Anthony) when the young man came at once to my side, and fought with me against the giant, and when the latter was overcome, brought me the promised crown of victory. Fear had kept Theodosius back from resolving to serve God in the wilderness; but the Lord strengthened him by this vision in which he gave him the assurance of His powerful help that he might find it easy to conquer the hellish foe. Such, too, shall be our experience in temptations, if we only call upon God with confidence, so that, as we have seen already, we shall be able to laugh at the devil.

Nay, we  
can drive  
him off with  
scorn, as the  
servants of  
God are  
wont to do.

In the same way the saints often treated the devil with scorn and contempt. To say nothing of many other instances, when St. Dunstan was still a young man, the devil tried to disturb him at prayer by appearing to him, sometimes in the shape of a black dog, sometimes in that of a wild bear; but the holy youth merely looked around, and taking up a big stick, beat the howling demon with it until it broke into three pieces. Afterwards, when he became a religious, he was engaged in some work, and the devil again came to him in the shape of a man, and asked his ad-

<sup>1</sup> Veni ad me, et dabo carnes tuas volatilibus cœli, et bestiis terræ. Tu venis ad me cum gladio, et hasta, et clypeo: ego autem venio ad te in nomine Domini exercituum, Dei agminum Israel. Dabit te Dominus in manu mea, et percutiam te, et auferam caput tuum a te; et dabo cadavera castrorum Philistinim hodie volatilibus cœli, et bestiis terræ, ut sciat omnis terra, quia est Deus in Israel.—I. Kings xvii. 44-46.

vice. Dunstan listened to the supposed man good-humoredly enough, but when he noticed the questions asked, and saw how his visitor changed color so often, he suspected who he was; wait a little, said he; and commanding him in the name of God to remain where he was, Dunstan went out and brought back a red-hot iron, with which he tweaked the devil by the nose until the evil spirit began to howl for mercy, and so he had to depart in confusion. Simeon Metaphrastes writes in the life of the holy virgin Juliana that the devil appeared to her like an angel, while she was chained in prison on account of her faith, and tried to persuade her to offer homage to the gods that she might prolong her life. The virgin, terrified at this wicked counsel, saw at once that it could not be a good angel who gave it; she called on her heavenly Bridegroom for help, and taking the chains that fell at once from her hands and feet, bound the foul spirit therewith and led him thus through all the streets and lanes of the city as a public laughing-stock. Unhappy me! cried the demon; what have I come to? must I now be led about like a slave by a weak maiden? St. Antoninus tells us that as St. Dominic was once preaching, the devil, who cannot bear the word of God, since it rescues so many from his hands, came into the church in the form of a sparrow, and tried to distract the attention of the people. Dominic told one of the congregation to catch the bird and bring it to him, which was done. The holy man seized him, to the great amusement of all present, plucked all his feathers out, one by one, and then threw him down on the ground: Go, you poor fool, he said; go to your comrades in hell, and do not dare to interrupt the sermon any longer.

See, my dear brethren, how little the devil can harm us; we can even afford to laugh at and despise him if we only humbly trust in God; and therefore no one has any reason to dread this robber on the way to heaven; and it is useless to try to excuse our sins by appealing to the violence of the temptations we have to endure. Oh, no! the only thing I need fear in that way is my own wicked will; if I do not go to heaven, it is simply because I do not wish to go; but if I am in earnest about saving my soul, no man on earth, no demon in hell can hinder me. So it is, wretched spirit of hell! I laugh at you and all your suggestions! You may burst with envy and hatred; I will, in spite of you, serve my God and make daily more and more progress on the road to heaven. If I am only a poor, weak, frail mortal, yet with the help

Conclusion  
and exhortation to despise the devil, and to serve God always with confidence.

and grace of my Lord I am powerful enough to withstand you and your temptations. I place my trust in God, whom I shall daily and humbly call upon, acknowledging my weakness with the prophet David: "When my strength shall fail, do not Thou forsake me." <sup>1</sup> For my part I shall be careful not to run into temptation without necessity, nor to give occasion to it; and when the evil one attacks me with temptations that I cannot avoid, "do not Thou forsake me!" Strengthen my weakness, that the hellish foe may not have to boast that he has stolen my soul out of Thy hands, that I may never again have cause for regret through having offended Thee by mortal sin, and that I may remain faithful to Thy service with joy of heart here on earth, until I shall love Thee forever in heaven. Amen.

*Another introduction to the same sermon for the first Sunday in Lent.*

**Text.**

*Ut tentaretur a diabolo.*—Matt. iv. 1.

"To be tempted by the devil."

**Introduction.**

What! and could not even Jesus Christ, the Son of God, be free from the devil? Has that hellish serpent dared to attack his almighty Creator, to appear before the Son of God with temptations to sin? Alas! how will it then be with me? etc. *Continues as above.*

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**SIXTY-THIRD SERMON.**

**ON THE USE OF THE TEMPTATIONS OF THE DEVIL ON THE WAY TO HEAVEN.**

**Subject.**

The devil with his temptations drives us all the quicker on the road to heaven; therefore we have nothing to fear in this respect, but rather to hope all the more for salvation.—*Preached on the feast of SS. Simon and Jude, apostles.*

<sup>1</sup> Cum defecerit virtus mea, ne derelinquas me.—Ps. lxx. 9.



**Text.**

*Quia de mundo non estis, sed ego elegi vos de mundo, propterea odit vos mundus.*—John xv. 19.

“Because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.”

**Introduction.**

This was the consolation that Christ gave His apostles and disciples when He foretold them what would happen them after His ascent into heaven. My dear disciples, you know how men have treated Me during My stay on earth; how they have always persecuted and tormented Me; the same shall happen to you. They will hate you, drive you out of their synagogues, hunt you from one city to another, imprison you, scourge you, and put you to death. And they will treat you in that way because you will refuse to conform to the perverse world, because you are My faithful servants and disciples. “Therefore the world hateth you.” But be not troubled at this; I shall be with you till the end of the world to help you. The same consolation might be given to those pious Christians who, if they are assailed by the devil with all sorts of abominable suggestions and temptations which torment and trouble them, are at once terrified, and begin almost to despair of their eternal salvation. What! faithful servants of God, be not afraid! Do you know why the devil plagues you in that way? Precisely because you do not want to have anything to do with him; precisely because you are determined to remain faithful to God the demons hate and persecute you. But fear not; the devil with all his power cannot hurt you; trust in God, who is with you and who protects you with His angels. So it is, good Christians, who are earnestly resolved to be faithful to God; on the way to heaven we need not fear the demons, for as I have shown in the last sermon, he cannot hinder any one from going to heaven, unless one who consents to be hindered. Nay, he is of more use than harm to us, as I shall now prove.

**Plan of Discourse.**

*The devil with his temptations drives us along all the quicker on the road to heaven: therefore we have nothing to fear from him in this respect, but rather to hope all the more for salvation. Encouragement to serve God joyfully is the end and object aimed at.*

### 326 *On the Use of the Temptations of the Devil.*

Give us Thy light and grace thereto, O God! We hope to receive them through the hands of Mary and the intercession of our guardian angels.

God allows  
the devils to  
tempt us.

It might be just matter for wonderment to think that God, who is infinitely wise and good, who arranges all things in most beautiful order, who is so desirous of our salvation, and wishes to have all men with Himself in heaven—to think that He does not keep the devil, a rebel against Him and our sworn enemy, always in the pit of hell, but allows countless numbers of demons to roam about the world; indeed many are of the opinion that the air is full of them, so that they are called “powers of the air.”<sup>1</sup> Nay, we may ask why does He allow a devil to be at the side of each man, although He well knows that their only object is to annoy men, to injure them in every possible way, and to drag them down to everlasting ruin. Whoever saw a father filling the house in which his dear children are to be born and bred with poisonous adders, serpents, and scorpions, that might hurt and kill the children? or seeking expressly a house in which there are grisly phantoms to disquiet and terrify the children? Whoever saw a shepherd driving all the wolves together into the forest in which he intends pasturing his sheep, so that his flock may run the danger of being devoured? Or whoever heard of a husbandman, before sowing his field, filling it with grasshoppers, mice, worms, and other vermin that they may eat up and destroy the growing crops? That would be to act quite contrary to the end he has in view. That is a queer way of showing fatherly love, we should say, to allow one’s children to run the risk of being destroyed; a queer kind of a shepherd who wishes to see his flock dispersed and eaten up; a vain labor on the part of the husbandman, who does not care about reaping a single crop of corn. In the same way one might think: if God is our Father and we are His children; if God is the Good Shepherd, as He calls Himself, and we are His sheep; if He is the Sower, as He says of Himself in the Gospel, and we are the seed that have to grow here on earth, and bring forth good fruit that we may one day be garnered into heaven, why then has He filled the earth with so many demons that are nothing else but so many poisonous serpents, hellish phantoms, hungry wolves, that harm us, terrify us, lead us into sin, devour our souls, and bring them to everlasting fire? why has He placed those demons in the world, which

<sup>1</sup> *Æreæ potestates.*

is our house, our forest, our field in which we have to live for a time and to bring forth fruit? Is that the way to show a true desire and wish to make all men eternally happy?

Yes, my dear brethren, from that very fact I take the chief proof of my proposition, and I say as a well-argued conclusion, that the devils with their temptations and the trouble they give us must necessarily help us on the way to heaven and be advantageous to our eternal salvation. Otherwise God, who loves us so much and is so desirous of our eternal welfare, would not have allowed them to dwell on earth, or to leave hell in order to tempt us. Truly those evil spirits are left in the world, not to injure, but to do us good, and that we may combat them, and with the help of God overcome them, and take possession of the seats in heaven from which they were expelled. They are left in the world that they may be plagued by envy more than by the fire of hell, when they see how we poor mortals can be their masters and fly up to heaven, while they are hurled into the abyss. In a word, they are left on earth that the very plans with which they intend our eternal ruin may help, against their will and intention, to our salvation.

Hence they must help to our salvation with their temptations.

But, you ask, how and in what manner can the demons be useful to us in the affair of our eternal salvation with their temptations and snares? How, I ask in turn, and in what manner are the shepherd's dogs useful in guarding the flock? For they run continually around the flock, barking at the poor sheep; they run after and frighten them, and if one gets separated from the others they bite it. And yet if there were no dog, many of the sheep would stray away into the forest and get lost, so that they could never return to their fold, but would be devoured by the fierce wolves. The barking and biting dogs keep them in order, so that they remain with the flock under the guidance of the shepherd, and follow readily wherever he leads. How and in what manner can the flesh of serpents, adders, and vipers be useful and advantageous to the health of men? It is full of poisonous matter that is capable of killing a man in a short time, and yet a most famous medicine is made of their flesh to warm and strengthen the stomach, expel poisonous humors, and re-establish the health. So that what is in itself injurious may, if properly prepared, and mixed with other medicines, be wholesome and good for the health. How and in what manner can the approaching enemy be useful to the warrior? For his only object is to

Similes showing how this is done.

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attack with fire and sword, and to cut down all before him. And yet if there were no enemy, how could the soldier show his bravery and heroism? How could he gain the crown of victory and rich spoils? How could he make a great name for himself before the world? The enemy gives him an opportunity of gaining all these advantages. Now it is in the same way that the temptations and snares of the devil are useful and advantageous to our salvation and to help us to gain heaven.

They keep  
us in humil-  
ity and the  
fear of God.

The devils are fierce dogs that run after us, bark, and terrify us; but they thus serve to keep us in humility and the fear of God. As St. Prosper says: "It is a great advantage for the faithful to have always some reason for combat, so that holiness may not give way to pride, while weakness is attacked."<sup>1</sup> And according to St. Gregory, God permits that after a sincere conversion, when the first temptations have been overcome, the combat should be renewed still more fiercely, lest we give way to an overweening sense of security or persuasion of our own sanctity, and thus be overthrown by a deceitful confidence.<sup>2</sup> If we were always at peace, and enjoyed repose of soul in continual contentment and consolation of conscience; if we had nothing to fight against or to defend ourselves from, we should have a great opinion of ourselves, and think a lot of the good we do, and often extol ourselves in thought above others; and thus we should act quite contrary to the Christian humility that is necessary to gain heaven. But, on the other hand, if we are often beset with importunate temptations of all kinds; if the infernal spirit excites our wicked inclinations and appetites, so that they often urge us to this or that vice, and we have to put forth all our strength to restrain them and keep within bounds, then we learn to know ourselves; we see what poor, frail creatures we are; how we must often fight against ourselves, and are always in danger of losing our souls, so that we see the necessity of walking cautiously, lest we should fall. Then we know how much we are in want of the divine help; for if it did not specially assist us, we should often have fallen into different sins. We learn, too, to have pity on other men when they sometimes waver and fall into grievous sin, for we know that the same may be our fate any day unless God

<sup>1</sup> Ad magnam utilitatem fidelium, materia est reservata certaminum; ut non superbiat sanctitas, dum pulsatur infirmitas.—S. Prosper l. i. de vocat. gent.

<sup>2</sup> Ne conversus quisque jam sanctum se esse credat, et quem moeroris pugna superare non valuit, ne ipsa postmodum securitas sternat; dispensante Deo permittitur ut post conversionem suam tentationis, stimulis fatigetur.

helps us with His grace. In a word, we learn that we have not the slightest reason to form a high opinion of ourselves, or to trust much to our virtue, but that we all have every reason to keep ourselves in humility, and look on ourselves as small and lowly in the sight of God.

St. Paul, writing to the Corinthians, says of himself: "There was given me a sting of my flesh, an angel of satan, to buffet me." What! great apostle; chosen vessel of the Holy Ghost! why does the just God allow you to be attacked by those importunate carnal temptations? What are the effects of the attacks of the devil on you? He gives us the answer himself: "Lest the greatness of the revelations should exalt me,"<sup>1</sup> and the graces I received from God. His meaning is, as St. Anselm says: this shameful temptation is allowed by God for the good of my soul, that it may keep me in humility. Paul had been rapt up to the third heaven, and was endowed with more wonderful gifts and graces than the other apostles; he was highly honored and almost adored by the people; in what a dangerous position he was as far as his humility was concerned! In what a dangerous occasion of giving way to vanity and self-conceit he found himself! And how was he to conquer the inclination? By what means was he to retain a humble and lowly opinion of himself? By temptation. The hideous demon of carnal lust was to attack him and assail him like a fierce dog; this was the best means of attaining the desired end. "There was given me a sting of my flesh, an angel of satan, to buffet me," that I might preserve my humility.

As St. Paul testifies of himself.

These dogs that run after us, the demons with their temptations, keep us within the bounds of the pious flock of Jesus Christ: make us avoid bad and dangerous company, watch over our eyes and other senses, shun all the occasions of sin, in which we should otherwise lose ourselves, fall away from the flock and become a prey to the hellish wolf. For we think to ourselves: why should I run needlessly into occasions and temptations, since, poor mortal that I am, in my own room I have enough to do to watch myself and keep myself from falling? A girl possessed by the devil was once brought to St. Hilarion, as St. Jerome tells us in the life of that saint. The man of God asked the evil spirit: "How did you dare to enter into this virgin, who

They keep us from the occasions of sin.

<sup>1</sup> Datus est mihi stimulus carnis mee, angelus satanæ, qui me colaphizet: ne magnitudo revelationum extollat me.—II. Cor. xii. 7.

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belongs to God?" "That she might remain a virgin,"<sup>1</sup> was the devil's answer; for otherwise she would have been led astray and have lost the pearl of her purity.

They urge  
us to prayer  
and good  
works.  
Shown by  
an example.

The barking of these hellish dogs urges us to constant prayer, to which St. Paul exhorts us to have recourse without ceasing; it compels us to fly to God, the Good Shepherd of our souls, for refuge, help, and protection, and to redouble our good works in order to retain His favor and friendship, of which we stand so much in need. This was well understood by the young hermit whom Hieribert mentions in his *Lives of the Fathers*; day and night the young man was so besieged by temptations against holy purity that with all his fasting, prayers, watchings, and austerities he could not get rid of them. His old master took pity on him; my son, said he, I will go and not cease praying for you until the merciful God frees you from this temptation, and from the grievous combats it causes you to sustain. No, Father, answered the other; although I have to fight with much toil and labor, yet I see that these temptations do me much good, since they compel me to fast and mortify my flesh more than I should otherwise have done, and to pray without ceasing. Only pray that I may not fall, and that is all I want. Beg of God not to free me from the temptation, for in that matter I leave myself altogether to His fatherly providence and holy will, but that I may never be overcome by the temptation, or consent to an unlawful pleasure. If I obtain that I shall be satisfied.

They keep  
our souls  
alive.

Further, the devils that tempt us are poisonous adders and serpents, a simile we have often used already, and as far as their intention goes, they would wish to destroy the soul with their venom; but as from the flesh of adders a wholesome medicine is made to restore and preserve the health of the body, so the providence of God, who loves us so much, knows how to prepare a medicine from the venom of those infernal serpents to heal the illness of the soul, to strengthen its virtues, and thus to keep it in life and vigor. St. Peter Damian explains this by a simile drawn from the manner in which a doctor treats a patient who is suffering from a superfluity of bad blood; he applies leeches, small worms in the shape of serpents, and allows them to bite into the flesh. Of course both the leeches and the doctor wish to draw blood from the sick man; but their object is quite different; the only desire of the leeches is to satiate themselves with blood,

<sup>1</sup> Quare ausus es ingredi puellam Del? Ut servarem eam virginem.

but that of the doctor is to cure his patient; the former fall off when they are satiated, and the sick man is cured by the loss of blood. So it is, too, with the hellish serpents when, by divine permission, they torment and terrify us; their sole object is to injure us and terrify us; but God, the true and well-meaning Physician of our souls, knows how by His grace to turn into a medicine for our salvation and the health of the soul the bites of those serpents, if we only wish that He should do so. It seems that St. Paul was instructed in this branch of medicine by his divine Master. Some of his Christians at Corinth had committed an abominable crime; when Paul heard of it, what do you think he did, my dear brethren, to bring the sinners to their senses? He delivered them over to the devil to be tormented; so he writes in his first Epistle to the Corinthians: "I indeed absent in body, but present in spirit, have already judged, as though I were present, him that hath so done in the name of Our Lord Jesus Christ...to deliver such a one to satan for the destruction of the flesh." To what end? How can the devil do any good to the poor man? "That," answers the Apostle, "the spirit may be saved in the day of Our Lord Jesus Christ."<sup>1</sup> St. Ambrose, considering this passage, cannot restrain his wonder: What a strange cure! he exclaims. And how great the power of Jesus Christ! "For He entrusts the guardianship of man to the devil, whose only wish is to injure." Yes, he concludes, it is true that "at the command of Christ the devil becomes the guardian of his own booty."<sup>2</sup>

Besides, Christian and heroic virtues, what would become of you if man were always left at peace and in repose, and were not assailed sometimes and forced to conquer impatience in adversity, and inclinations to other vices in time of temptation? Where there is no combat nor overcoming one's self, there there is no place for virtue. With reason does the wise Ecclesiasticus ask: "He that hath not been tried, what manner of things doth he know?"<sup>3</sup> What great art or praiseworthy virtue is there in being patient when one has no contradiction to suffer? meek when no one opposes you? humble when not even a thought of pride or

They  
strengthen  
and increase  
our virtues.

<sup>1</sup> *Ego quidem absens corpore, præsens autem spiritu, jam judicavi ut præsens, qui sic operatus est, in nomine Domini nostri Jesu Christi... tradere hujusmodi satanæ in interitum carnis, ut spiritus salvus sit in die Domini nostri Jesu Christi.*—I. Cor. v. 3-5.

<sup>2</sup> *Ut custodia hominis imperetur etiam ipsi diabolo, qui semper vult nocere. Imperante Christo, et diabolus ipse fit prædæ suæ custos.*

<sup>3</sup> *Qui tentatus non est, qualis scit?*—Ecclesi. xxxiv. 11.

vanity occurs to you? temperate when you have no appetite for food or drink? chaste when you never feel any unruly inclinations? There is no great art in that, nor does it merit the name of virtue. But to have and preserve all these virtues by dint of fighting in the midst of importunate temptations, that is both admirable and praiseworthy; that is what proves, practises, strengthens, and increases true virtue. Mark how, on the one hand, the all-wise providence of God, in order to make men virtuous, allows the devils to tempt them; and on the other how the devils are deceived in their hopes, for they cannot bear virtue, and their efforts to destroy it are turned to its advantage; when they pour their poison into the soul it becomes a valuable medicine to preserve the soul in life.

They make  
our crown  
in heaven  
more glorious.  
Shown by  
examples.

Finally, the devils are our sworn enemies, as we have seen recently, and they attack us secretly and publicly on all sides, in all ways, and force us to fight. But what the approaching enemy brings to the brave warrior, that the enemies of our souls bring to us, although against their will. What is that? A higher place in heaven, a brighter and more glorious crown. This is your good fortune, O man! although you are not aware of it, that when you, trusting in the divine help that will never be wanting to your humble prayer, resist temptation bravely and overcome it, the assurance given you by the Holy Ghost by the mouth of the apostle St. James shall be fulfilled in your regard: "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation." Why? "For when he hath been proved he shall receive the crown of life, which God hath promised to them that love Him,"<sup>1</sup> and do not allow themselves to be turned away from Him by any temptation. According to St. Thomas of Aquin, we shall have in heaven a crown of glory, and that shall be a reward common to all the elect; but besides that there shall be different other crowns of honor, called by theologians aureoles, and these shall be given only to those who on earth have had special combats to sustain for the love of God and heaven, and have conquered in them. First, there will be the virgins, who in the combat against sensuality have brought their purity untarnished with them into eternity; secondly, the martyrs, who have had to struggle with the tyrants of the world, and to suffer torments and a violent death for the faith or some other virtue; thirdly, the doctors, who have fought against the devil, from

<sup>1</sup> *Beatus vir qui suffert tentationem, quoniam cum probatus fuerit, accipiet coronam vite, quam repromisit Deus diligentibus se.*—James 1. 12.



whom they have saved many souls and brought them to God by their instructions. Now, my dear brethren, is there any one who cannot reckon himself among any of these three classes, because he cannot boast either of virginity or martyrdom, or of having instructed and converted souls? Oh, let him not lose heart; there are crowns enough to be gained in heaven if we only strive manfully against the temptations of the devil, who assails us with the help of the vain world and of our own flesh, and never yield to them.

Heribert, whom I have quoted already, writes of a religious shown by examples. who for nine consecutive years was plagued with the most horrible temptations, desires, and suggestions against purity, so that at last, disgusted with the religious life, he thought there was no chance of salvation for him, and that he could have no hopes of heaven. In his despair he determined to leave the convent and return to the world. But as he was about to carry out this intention he heard a voice calling out to him: fear not, be of good heart! "the temptations that you have sustained for nine years shall bring you in as many crowns,"<sup>1</sup> for you have not consented to them. Nearly to the same effect was the revelation made by God to the seraphic St. Francis regarding a religious, whom he begged of God to free from severe temptations. The Almighty also deigned to declare the same truth in a wonderful vision to a holy lay-brother of the Cistercian Order. One of these holy religious had three times sustained an attack of the evil spirit against his purity during the night, but he was fervent and constant, and kept on calling for help to Our Lord, to the Blessed Virgin Mary, and to his patron saints, until at last he gained the victory. On the same night the lay-brother, who was in a country-house outside the convent, was brought in spirit to a very large and magnificent hall; there he beheld seated on a high throne Jesus Christ, Our Lord, beside Him His blessed Mother, and around Him a multitude of angels and saints. The good brother, greatly delighted at the sight of this assembly, then saw an angel coming before the throne with three palm-branches made of the finest silver, and heard him say, as he offered them to Our Lord: these are the palm-branches that so-and-so (calling the religious by name) gained in his combat against the devil and his temptations. Our Lord took the palms with every expression of satisfaction, and showed them to His

<sup>1</sup> Tentationes quas novem annis sustinulisti, totidem coronæ tue erunt.

holy Mother, and to the angels and saints, who appeared greatly delighted and pleased. Then Our Lord commanded three crowns to be made of the palms, and to be set with the most costly precious stones, to adorn the victor with a threefold crown. The angel gave the crowns to the lay-brother, commanding him to give them to the religious. He thought he was receiving them, and then the vision came to an end. When the brother returned to the convent he related all that had occurred to his superior, who sent for the monk and told him in holy obedience to let him know what he had done in particular for the honor and glory of God during that night. The religious told him with the greatest humility how he had sustained three violent temptations against purity, but with the help of God's grace had fortunately overcome them. Then the superior congratulated him, and said: Be of good heart, for the Lord has sent you a threefold crown of glory as a reward for your threefold victory. Our Lord is wont to adapt Himself to our understanding, and teaches us many spiritual things by means of things that may be perceived by the senses. In this vision He has shown you what a great reward He will bestow on him who bravely resists the assaults of temptation and overcomes them. The victor shall be rewarded with an inward consolation that is called in the Book of Ecclesiasticus "a crown of joy."<sup>1</sup> He shall be rewarded with an increase of the indwelling grace of God, by which his soul shall be made more beautiful and glorious; this is called by the Prophet Ezechiel "a beautiful crown,"<sup>2</sup> and in the Book of Wisdom "a crown of beauty."<sup>3</sup> He shall be rewarded with the right to greater glory in heaven, which St. Peter calls "a never-fading crown of glory."<sup>4</sup>

They make  
us like mar-  
tyrs.

Nay, we might say that a victory over temptation places us amongst the martyrs. Lawrence a Ponte, in his explanation of the eighth chapter of St. Matthew, relates that a certain holy person wondered and complained to God that He gave so much power to the demons to take possession of even innocent, saintly men, and to torment so cruelly those living temples of God; and she received this answer: In the beginning of the Church I won many souls and brought them to heaven by martyrdom, but I also lost many thereby who were afraid of the torture, and denied Me and their faith. Now I wish to make martyrs and lose

<sup>1</sup> Corona exultationis.—Ecclus. i. 11.

<sup>2</sup> Diadema speciei.—Wis. v. 17.

<sup>3</sup> Corona decoris.—Ezech. xvi. 12.

<sup>4</sup> Immarcescibilem gloriæ coronam.—I. Pet. v. 4.

no souls by it; “therefore I give permission to the demons of hell” to take possession of and torture men, and so to place them in the number of the martyrs. But, my God, have we not just as much reason for saying that the same result is obtained by other violent and trying temptations that so often, and almost constantly, assail our humility, purity, patience, temperance, meekness, and poverty of spirit, and thus give us trouble and torment enough? Are not those temptations a martyrdom to us if we constantly overcome them for Thy sake? Is not the torture of the mind, the soul, the interior spirit, far more keen and painful than bodily weakness? Pious servants of God, who love your Lord above all things, does it not appear an intolerable torment to you to be tempted to commit a grievous sin and to abandon your God? Would you not allow yourselves to be cut to pieces and willingly suffer a most painful death rather than consent to such temptations and renounce God and heaven? There is no doubt that such should be the firm resolution of every one of us. Be comforted and rejoice in the Lord: those temptations that you dread and abhor so much place, as it were, a martyr’s crown on your heads, although not on account of the faith, for which you have no occasion of suffering, yet on account of virtue and the love of God for which you fight and bear so intolerable a burden. True it is that “Blessed is the man that endureth temptation; for when he hath been proved, he shall receive the crown of life;” and a crown all the more splendid and glorious in proportion to the violence and number of the temptations he withstood.

We see now, my dear brethren, how true are the words of St. Paul: “God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that which you are able, but will make also with temptation issue.”<sup>1</sup> From the efforts of the enemy to draw you into evil, no matter how violent and importunate they may be, He will cause your soul to derive much profit and help for its salvation. From this we can see how little we have to fear the attacks of the devil; for the very means they use to try to make us leave the path of salvation only serve to help us to walk thereon more quickly and securely.

Unhappy sinners, who so easily allow yourselves to be betrayed by the devil through some empty imagination of a momen-

Thus the devils help us to ascend higher in heaven.

Hence sinners are

<sup>1</sup> *Fidelis autem Deus est, qui non patietur vos tentari supra id quod potestis; sed faciet etiam cum tentatione proventum.*—1. Cor. x. 13.

much to be  
pitied be-  
cause they  
give them-  
selves to the  
devil of  
their own  
accord,  
without  
being  
tempted.

tary brutish pleasure, or vain honor, or temporal gain! How I pity you! Yet the devil need take no trouble to deceive you: for even without being tempted you submit willingly to him as his slaves. A holy monk once saw a legion of demons all occupied in besieging his convent; they were on the roof, at the windows, in the courtyards, in the corridors, and in the cells, and all were most busily engaged. He then saw over the city one single devil, who seemed quite idle and had nothing to do. This vision filled him with wonderment. What! he said; the monks are always striving to banish the devils by constant fasting, severe scourgings, continual prayer, and psalmody, and yet they are besieged by the foul spirits on all sides! The people of the city do not fast, nor scourge themselves, nor pray, and they are free from that terrible torment! While thus cogitating an angel appeared to him, and at once put an end to his astonishment. Because, said the angel, the monks fight and resist vigorously a whole swarm of the hellish spirits attacks them, in order to tempt them and to try if they cannot gain even a slight advantage over them. But in that wicked city, where no one fights against the evil one, one devil is enough to keep the inhabitants in subjection. St. Augustine said in his day, and complained of it bitterly, that many are neither tempted nor conquered, and yet they are sinners. They let themselves be led into sin without any previous diabolical temptation. Sin does not seek them or come to their hands of itself; they seek it and go to meet it, and of their own accord hang its chains around themselves.<sup>1</sup> They do not await the attack, but anticipate it, and delight in thought in the pleasure that sin is to bring them.<sup>2</sup> And speaking of the words of the fifty-first psalm, “All the day long thy tongue hath devised injustice,”<sup>3</sup> he lays particular stress on the words “all the day long,” that is, every hour, without interruption, or intermission, or rest.<sup>4</sup> “And if you do not commit evil in act, you do it in thought; so that when your hands abstain from sin, your heart is not free from it.”<sup>5</sup> The whole day you sin in deed, and when that is impossible you sin in word,

<sup>1</sup> Sunt multi qui ut peccent, non solum non vincuntur, sed ultro se peccato offerunt.—S. Aug. de vera et falsa poenit.

<sup>2</sup> Nec expectant tentationem, sed præveniunt voluptatem, et pertractant secum, quam multiplici actione vitii delectabiliter peccent.

<sup>3</sup> Tota die injustitiam cogitavit lingua tua.—Ps. li. 4.

<sup>4</sup> Id est, toto tempore, sine lassitudine, sine intervallo, sine pausatione.

<sup>5</sup> Et quando non facis, cogitas; ut quando aliquid mali abest a manibus, a corde non abest.

and when that too is beyond your power, you sin by taking pleasure in bad thoughts.<sup>1</sup> When you are not actually engaged in deceiving others your mind is busy the whole day with all sorts of tricks and plans of deceit: "They studied deceits all the day long."<sup>2</sup> If you are not actually engaged in a quarrel, you spend the day preparing for it: "All the day long they designed battles."<sup>3</sup> If through want of power or opportunity the sinful act cannot be accomplished, yet you think of, and desire, and wish for it the whole day: "He longeth and desireth all the day."<sup>4</sup> The devil is very active in tempting the just and the newly-converted, but he takes no trouble to tempt sinners. The former, as St. Gregory says, he tempts in order to bring them under his yoke; the latter he leaves alone, as he has them already in his power. "The more he sees us resisting him, the more does he attack us, while he does not interfere with those whom he possesses securely, but he is all the more excited against us, because he has been expelled from our hearts as from his own dwelling."<sup>5</sup> As long as God was pleased to be honored by the law of Moses, the Hebrews often fell into idolatry; but since the coming of Our Lord Jesus Christ, when God wishes to be honored by the observance of the Christian law, the Jews have not had even a trace of a temptation to idolatry. When they were the people of God, the devil tempted them to make them his people; but since by their incredulity and obstinacy they are already his bondsmen, he holds peaceful possession of them. But as soon as they think of embracing the true faith, he begins his temptations again. Unhappy sinners, I repeat, how sorry I am to see you giving yourselves so easily into the hands of the foul fiend; for your state makes it impossible for you to understand what we have been saying hitherto. May the merciful God open your eyes, and give you the grace of repentance!

But you, pious Christians, who are determined to serve God and to gain heaven, be not disturbed or troubled, much less should you be afraid or cowardly, even if you have to suffer the

Conclusion  
and exhortation to  
serve God

<sup>1</sup> Aut facis malum, aut dum non potes facere, dicis malum; aut quando nec hoc potes, vis et cogitas malum.

<sup>2</sup> Dolos tota die meditabantur.—Ps. xxxvii. 13.

<sup>3</sup> Tota die constituebant prelia.—Ibid. cxxxix. 3.

<sup>4</sup> Tota die concupiscit et desiderat.—Prov. xxi. 26.

<sup>5</sup> Quanto magis nos sibi rebellare conspiciat, tanto amplius expugnare contendit: eos enim pulsare negligit, quos quieto jure possidere se sentit; contra nos vero eo vehementius excitatur, quod ex corde nostro, quasi ex jure propriæ habitationis expellitur.—S. Greg. i. 24, moral. c. 7.

humbly,  
and not to  
fear the  
devil.

most abominable enticements to the most horrible sins. Only keep fast to that resolution rather to die and even choose hell itself than consent to sin and offend God; then trust in the Lord and call humbly upon Him to help you, and you will have nothing to fear, but rather reason to rejoice. Yes; that is all I have to do! I give my soul, O God! into the hands of Thy fatherly providence, and abandon it to Thy good will and pleasure, even where there is question of sustaining attacks and temptations from the hellish foe. If I have to suffer many and importunate temptations, may Thy holy will be done! I will not cease to pray with the Catholic Church: "From the snares of the devil, deliver us, O Lord!" Free me from this or that violent temptation that, as it were, almost forces me to be untrue to Thee; yet I will always add, after the example of Thy divine Son: "Nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt,"<sup>1</sup> for Thou knowest better than I what is good for my soul. Do Thou only answer this prayer of mine, as Thou didst answer the prayer of Thy holy apostle Paul, when he begged of Thee to free him from temptation: "My grace is sufficient for thee."<sup>2</sup> Oh, yes, my God, and it will be enough for me too, and I shall willingly be content with it! This grace is all I ask. Let me now die where I stand by a sudden death rather than permit any temptation to separate me from Thy love and friendship! If I have Thy helping grace, then, ye demons! come all of you against me! I laugh at you! Against your will you shall only help me by your temptations to advance all the more quickly on the way to my longed-for heavenly fatherland; you shall help me to serve my God with more zeal and perfection; you shall give me the opportunity of practising humility, without which virtue salvation may not be hoped for; you shall urge me to pray more frequently and fervently, and to redouble my good works; you shall teach me and compel me to guard my eyes and other senses more carefully, and to keep them in check, to avoid the dangers and occasions of sin, and to fear committing even the least deliberate venial sin, that to my God, whose help I always stand in the greatest need of, I may never give the least cause to abandon me in temptation; you shall help me to add to my virtues and merits, and, finally, you shall add to my crown and my glory in heaven, whither all my wishes tend. Amen.

<sup>1</sup> Veruntamen non sicut ego volo, sed sicut tu.—Matt. xxvi. 39.

<sup>2</sup> Sufficit tibi gratia mea.—II. Cor. xii. 9.

*God's Earnest Wish to Save the Souls of Men.* 339

*Another introduction to the same sermon for the fourth Sunday in Lent.*

**Text.**

*Surgite, et nolite timere.*—Matt. xvii. 7.

“Arise, and fear not.”

**Introduction.**

How is it, My dear disciples, that you have so soon lost your courage? You said first: “Lord, it is good for us to be here;” let us build tabernacles, that we may remain always in this place of delights. And now the mere sound of a voice from the clouds terrifies you to such an extent that you fall down in fear and trembling? “Arise, and fear not.” See, I am still with you. To this effect did Our Lord address His disciples. My dear brethren, what happened to them occurs daily to many servants of God, who are determined to walk constantly on the way to heaven. During the time of inward peace and consolation, that is, when they feel a zeal and taste for spiritual works of devotion, oh, then their hearts are filled with joy, and they cry out with the apostles: “Lord, it is good for us to be here!” Oh, how pleasant it is to serve God, and to love Him with our whole hearts! But if God permits the foul spirit to approach them with his temptations, either to impure imaginations, or a shameful rebellion of the flesh, or to spiritual dryness, oh, then they lose heart! Then they think all is lost, and almost despair of salvation, so great is their terror and anguish. Dear Saviour, call out to them: “Arise, and fear not!” Are you so frightened at the devil and his assaults? With all his power he cannot harm you as long as I am with you by My helping grace. So it is, etc. *Continues as above.*

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*SIXTY-FOURTH SERMON.*

**ON GOD'S EARNEST WISH TO SAVE THE SOULS OF ALL MEN.**

**Subject.**

The almighty God has an earnest, and, as far as in Him lies, an efficacious will to bring all men to heaven; therefore we have nothing to fear as far as God is concerned in this respect, but

### 340 *God's Earnest Wish to Save the Souls of Men.*

should hope for heaven.—*Preached on the fifth Sunday after Easter.*

#### Text.

*Non auditor obliviosus factus, sed factor operis: his beatus in facto suo erit.*—James i. 25. (From to-day's Epistle.)

“Not becoming a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work: this man shall be blessed in his deed.”

#### Introduction.

Rejoice, good Christians, who serve the Lord: “A doer of the work shall be blessed in his deed;” that is, he who knows the law and good will of God and keeps it in all his actions. And this holds good of all without exception; all who do this constantly shall be saved. Now, you endeavor to do the will of God in all things, and have firmly resolved to do it to the end; therefore you are among those who are on the right road to heaven, and if you are true to your determination, you shall infallibly possess the kingdom of heaven. Go on as you are going, and be of good heart. Yes, many say, some of whom are pious and timid, while others are wicked and half despairing: how do I know what God means to do with me? whether He has enrolled me in the number of His elect who are destined for heaven? And if He does not want me there, what will all my efforts avail? These disturbing thoughts are encouraged by those whose doctrine confines the goodness of God in such narrow limits, as if He selected for heaven only those whom He has determined to bring there by predestination, as it is called, or a choice made of them from eternity. To help souls to lay aside this saddening thought, and to encourage all to serve the Lord with zeal and joy, I will now prove the contrary, and I say:

#### Plan of Discourse.

*The almighty God has an earnest, and, as far as He is concerned, an efficacious will to bring all men to heaven; therefore in this respect we have no cause for fear as far as God is concerned, but rather reason to rejoice, and, if we only wish, to console ourselves with the hope of heaven. Such is the whole subject.*

Do Thou, O good God! give us Thy light and grace through the intercession of Mary and of the holy angels.



## *God's Earnest Wish to Save the Souls of Men.* 341

There is no doubt that a man has an earnest will, and as far as he is concerned, an efficacious one to accomplish an object for which he has a great wish and desire, and to secure which he also makes use of all necessary means, although here and there, contrary to his will, the desired object is not attained. That must be our judgment of the merchant, who through desire of gain spares neither labor nor trouble, and takes advantage of every opportunity of profit that offers: travelling here and there, taking the trouble of buying and selling, carefully noting down all his transactions, and often making up his books. That man, we must say, has an earnest, efficacious will to become rich, although, as often happens, misfortunes may cross his design and keep him poor against his will. In the same way a father spares no expense that he thinks necessary for the proper education of his son; he sends him to school to be instructed in various branches of learning; he keeps a watchful eye on all his actions; he gets others to look after him, and by frequent admonitions, threats, promises, urges him to study diligently, and to behave well and in a praiseworthy and becoming manner before God and the world. No one will deny that that father has indeed an earnest and an efficacious will to make his child a learned and good man, although, as parents often experience to their sorrow, all the expense and trouble avail nothing, and the son remains an ignorant, awkward, dissolute fellow, through stupidity and weakness of mind, or laziness and carelessness, or wickedness and obstinacy.

Such is the earnest and, as far as He is concerned, the efficacious will that the good God has to make all men happy, and to bring them all, without exception, to heaven. He has created them all for no other end but to be eternally happy; He has an earnest wish and desire that all should be happy; He gives to all sufficient means to attain eternal happiness. And it is in this will that the vocation to heaven consists, of which Our Lord says: "Many are called;"<sup>1</sup> that is, all are called, as shall be shown hereafter. This calling and earnest will of the Almighty to make all men happy has no regard to the merits and good works of men, but comes solely from the goodness and generosity of God. One fact. But as God has left men free, and will not force any one to go to heaven, but has resolved that each one should use the means provided according to his own free will,

*In what consists a will that is earnest and in itself efficacious.*

*What is the earnest, and in itself efficacious, will of God to save all men.*

<sup>1</sup> Multi sunt vocati.—Matt. xx. 16.

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and thus gain heaven, so He has, besides the general will, another that rests on our co-operation and merit: namely, to grant heaven to man if the latter uses, as he can, the means provided, does good, and perseveres in the love and grace of God till the end of his life.

Shown by a simile.

To make this clearer: suppose there is a rich man who has no wife or children, and who therefore adopts a poor student, making him heir to all his property, an inheritance that the student cannot possess, unless he takes it of his own free will, as all testaments require; for although I am made heir by will, I cannot be compelled to accept the inheritance; I am free to do so or not. Now in this case it is evident that the first will of the rich man, by which he desired to make the student heir to his wealth, came simply from goodness and charity, without any reference to merit on the student's part; but the other will, by which he desires that the student should really take possession of the inheritance, is not absolute, but conditional, namely, if the student consents to take it. So does the Almighty act with us: that He created us, adopted us as His children, prepared the inheritance of heaven for us, and richly equipped us with all the means necessary to gain it, all that is an effect of the mercy and goodness of God, and we have contributed nothing whatever thereto; but the actual taking possession of heaven depends also on ourselves, and this latter God wills, not absolutely, but on condition that we accept and merit it. Now, as future things are as clear to Him as the present, if God sees that this or that man will use the means provided, keep His law, and persevere in His grace, then His wish and desire is fulfilled, and He says: that man shall possess My eternal kingdom. And in that decree and determination consists so-called predestination, or choice and election to heaven, of which again Our Lord says: "Few are chosen."<sup>1</sup>

Hence God condemns the sinner unwillingly. Shown by a simile.

From this it follows, first, that the smallness of the number of the elect does not arise from the fact that God only wishes a few to be saved, but rather from this, that only a few really wish to merit and accept eternal salvation. Secondly, all men can be in the number of the elect if they only wish earnestly to make use of the proper means, and to persevere in good to the end. Thirdly, God has no antecedent, absolute will to send any one to hell; He wills it only under this condition: if man, through his own fault, wills not to merit heaven, and so to be damned.

<sup>1</sup> Pauci vero electi.—Matt. xx. 16.

Finally, when God determines to send any one, no matter who he is, to hell, He is, as it were, forced to do so; He does it, so to speak, with vexation, regret, and against His antecedent, general will, by which He wishes and desires to make all men happy. In this way He is like the rich father who has many children; the latter loves all his children, and has provided well for them in his will; he sees that they are all well educated; if one of them is sick, the father is troubled and sorry, and spares no expense to try to restore him to health by means of medicine; if he hears that one of his sons is leading a bad and worthless life, he is more afflicted at it than at the illness of his other child; but yet he will not reject the undutiful son at once, nor exclude him from the number of his children; he first exhorts him paternally, and admonishes him to amend, and promises him his fatherly love and favor the same as before, if he will only lead a better life and attend to his duty. But if he sees that all his efforts are unavailing, that the undutiful son only grows worse and worse, and gives no sign of improvement, then indeed he is forced, although sorely against his will and inclination, to take away the shame from the other members of his family, to shut up the wicked son in prison for the rest of his life, or to disinherit him; for if he neglected to do that, people could accuse him of not doing his duty as a father should. Such is the way in which our heavenly Father acts. All men are His adopted children; He loves them more than any earthly father ever loved his offspring; He tells us so Himself; and for all He has prepared eternal happiness. Now if He finds among them rebellious, undutiful children, He does not at once on that account withdraw from them His fatherly care, as all sinners daily experience; He tries to convert them by making them uneasy in conscience, by temporal adversity, by secret inspirations and warnings, and He offers them His grace as before, if they return to Him by true repentance and amend their lives; but if all this does no good, if they still continue to act as His enemies and remain impenitent until death, then He is forced, in order not to neglect His duty as Judge, to change His mind, as it were, and to exclude them from the number of His children, and imprison them for eternity. Hear how He complains of this by the Prophet Isaias: "Ah! I will comfort Myself over My adversaries, and I will be revenged of my enemies;"<sup>1</sup> alas! I am at

<sup>1</sup> Heu! consolabor super hostibus meis, et vindicabor de inimicis meis.—Is. l. 24.

last forced to do this! "Jerusalem, Jerusalem," He says in the Gospel of St. Matthew, "... how often would I have gathered together thy children, as the hen doth gather her chickens under her wings, and thou wouldst not." Now I must do what I am very unwilling to do: "Behold, your house shall be left to you desolate."<sup>1</sup>

Proved from  
Scripture  
that God has  
an earnest  
will to save  
all men.

See there, my dear brethren, the foundation of our hope and spiritual joy in the Lord. And that it is well-grounded, that God has that general, antecedent, earnest, and, as far as He is concerned, efficacious will, in the sense explained, to bring all men to heaven, and not to condemn to hell any one unless him who wilfully chooses not to be saved—that no Catholic can deny. let him talk as he will about predestination and eternal election to heaven, unless he wishes to go directly against the Holy Scriptures, the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the general opinion of the Catholic Church, the goodness and mercy of God, and the foundation of Christian hope. In the first place, St. Paul, in his first epistle to Timothy, speaks of this truth in terms so clear that they cannot be clearer: "I desire therefore, first of all, that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all men, . . . that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all piety and chastity; for this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour, who will have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one Mediator of God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a redemption for all."<sup>2</sup> There he says not once, but several times, that God wills all men to be saved. We must pray, he says, for all; God wishes all men to come to the knowledge of the truth, to be converted to the light of the true faith, and to be eternally happy. Christ offers Himself to the Eternal Father as a redemption for all, no one excepted. And the Apostle confirms his words by the proof: "There is one God, and one Mediator of God and men;" as if to say: if there were several gods or several mediators, one might perhaps fear

<sup>1</sup> Jerusalem, Jerusalem, quoties volui congregare filios tuos, quemadmodum gallina congregat pullos suos sub alas; et noluisti. Ecce relinquetur vobis domus vestra deserta. — Matt. xxiii. 37, 38.

<sup>2</sup> Obsecro primum omnium fieri obsecrationes, orationes, postulationes, gratiarum actiones pro omnibus hominibus . . . ut quietam et tranquillam vitam agamus in omni pietate et castitate; hoc enim bonum est et acceptum coram Salvatore nostro Deo, qui omnes homines vult salvos fieri, et ad agnitionem veritatis venire. Unus enim Deus, unus et mediator Dei et hominum, homo Christus-Jesus, qui dedit redemptionem semetipsum pro omnibus. — I. Tim. ii. 1-6.

that this or that god or mediator cared little for him, or was not desirous of his salvation; just as in this world, where there are many kings and princes, every country cannot expect to be protected by every ruler. The king of Spain looks only after the Spaniards; the king of France cares only for Frenchmen; the Roman emperor for his empire; they do not trouble themselves about strangers. No; all men have one and the same God, and Redeemer, and heavenly Father; therefore, concludes the Apostle, this God takes care of all men, and has an earnest wish, as far as He is concerned, to save them all.

Truly, God Himself says the same to the Prophet Ezechiel, and confirms it with an oath. "Say to them: As I live, saith the Lord God: I desire not the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way, and live."<sup>1</sup> Now if God does not wish to exclude even the sinner from heaven, whom should He then refuse to bring there? Truly, if any one on earth deserves to be abandoned by God the sinner deserves that fate, for wilfully and wantonly he sets himself against the divine majesty, and openly insults it. Hence, according to theologians, the fire of hell is too mild a punishment for even one mortal sin. Now if the goodness of God cannot be surpassed by the grievous insults offered Him by sinners, if in spite of them He still keeps His will and desire to convert and save them, then we can have no doubt that He has the earnest will, as far as He is concerned, to bring all men to the kingdom of heaven, and if any one is damned it is through his own fault, and contrary to the wish and intention of the Almighty. Do you wish to have a clearer proof of this? Read the eighteenth chapter of St. Matthew; there you will learn the same truth from the lips of Jesus Christ. After Our Lord had spoken the parable of the good shepherd, who leaves the ninety-nine sheep and goes over hill and dale in search of the one that is lost, and when he finds it brings it back on his shoulders rejoicing, He adds these words: "Even so it is not the will of your Father, who is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish."<sup>2</sup> But if God does not wish that one of the least should be lost, that is, be damned forever, then He must necessarily wish to save them all and make them eternally happy; for, excepting the case of infants who die without bap-

Even the  
most wick-  
ed sinners.

<sup>1</sup> Dic ad eos: vivo ego, dicit Dominus Deus: nolo mortem impii, sed ut convertatur impius a via sua, et vivat.—Ezech. xxxiii. 11.

<sup>2</sup> Sic non est voluntas ante Patrem vestrum qui in caelis est, ut pereat unus de pusillis istis.—Matt. xviii. 14.

tism, there is no alternative between being lost forever and being eternally happy.

Confirmed  
by what  
God has  
done for all  
men.

Again, if God had not signified anywhere in Holy Writ this wish and desire for the salvation of all men, then would I say to him who ventures to think the contrary what Our Lord said to the obstinate Pharisees: "Though you will not believe Me, believe the works."<sup>1</sup> If you do not trust My words, then look at the works I do; from them you must see that I am true God. In the same way I say: O ye of little faith! if there are no words or arguments to convince you that God earnestly desires the salvation of all men, then believe His works at least; see what He has done for all men. The emperor Caligula, a monster of cruelty and vice, led a large army against the sea, and set his soldiers in battle array, as if they were in front of an enemy, or about to take a fortress: ladders, catapults, swords, and lances were ready on all sides, and he himself, as commander-in-chief, rode along the line seriously exhorting his men to show their bravery and valor. And what was the object of all this? Why this great preparation of soldiers and arms? I am ashamed to say it; the object was to catch the fish that lay on the shore concealed in the mud, a great number of which were brought to Rome as a tribute from the conquered ocean. Foolish emperor! Such great preparations, so much expense for such a trifling thing! My dear brethren, when we consider what God has done for us men, we must either say by a horrible blasphemy that He is like Caligula in preparing mighty means for a very poor end, or we must acknowledge that our salvation is an affair of the utmost importance, that He thinks a great deal about it, and therefore that He has the earnest will to make us all eternally happy. From all eternity God thought of all men, and considered, as it were, how to bring them to heaven. And His thoughts were followed by works; the whole machine of the world is built and arranged by God to help us to save our souls; the heavens, the elements, the beasts in the forests, the trees and flowers in the gardens: all these are means to help us to save our souls. Even the princes of heaven, the angels, who are so far superior to us, are not ashamed to walk continually at the side of even the poorest man to help him to gain eternal happiness. Hence Tertullian calls man "the object of the care of the divine mind."<sup>2</sup> Yes, says Richard of St. Victor,

<sup>1</sup> Si mihi non vultis credere, operibus credite.—John x. 38.

<sup>2</sup> Curam divini ingenii.

the whole Blessed Trinity is occupied with the affair of the salvation of mankind. The omnipotence of the Father is at work taking out of the way all the obstacles to our salvation; the wisdom of the Son points out to us the means we should use to secure it; the love and goodness of the Holy Ghost are at work strengthening our souls and enriching them with gifts. So that the three Persons of the adorable Trinity are occupied with our salvation. What would be the object of all that if God did not earnestly desire to make all men eternally happy?

Consider that all men are the works of the hands of God; for He has created them, and created them too to His own image; and can we any longer doubt this truth? Every master loves and values the works that proceed from his skill; to find fault with them or despise them is a disgrace and shame to him. Hence comes the natural love and affection that parents have for their children, and the great and unwearied care they take of the welfare of their offspring. Nor do we see that in men alone, but even in the brute beast, aye, and in the fiercest lions and tigers, for they too love their young, care for them, and protect them from danger. It is the Lord God who has given to His creatures the love they have for what comes from them; and is He to be the only one who has no love or affection for the work of His own hands? Is God the only Master, the only Father, of all masters and fathers, who wishes to prepare for His children eternal woe instead of happiness and well-being? Is God the only one, although His nature is love and goodness itself, who is surpassed by the lions and tigers, the dragons and serpents, and all that is savage in the wilderness, the only one who is surpassed by them in love for His own? Eh! the mere thought of such a thing is a grievous injustice, an absurd imputation on such a Lord.

Therefore God loves all men, and that too with a most tender love, precisely because He is their Creator, because He is their Author and Father, because hatred and contempt of His work would redound to the Master's dishonor. This sound proof is adduced by the Wise Man in the Book of Wisdom in these words: "Thou lovest all things that are, and hatest none of the things which Thou hast made: for Thou didst not appoint or make anything hating it. But Thou sparest all, because they are Thine, O Lord! who lovest souls."<sup>1</sup> See, here again nothing is ex-

God is the  
Creator and  
Father of all  
men; hence  
He loves  
them all.

But if He  
loves them  
all, He  
desires their  
salvation,  
not damna-  
tion.

<sup>1</sup> *Diligis enim omnia quæ sunt, et nihil odisti eorum quæ fecisti: nec enim odians aliquid*

cluded; God loves all things, and that too because they proceed from Him and are His works. Now if God loves all men, He also wishes and desires the welfare of all, for therein love consists. Hence He wills and desires that all men should be saved, and none lost; for what greater misfortune could He wish to any one than to wish that he should not be saved, but (for this follows as a necessary consequence) be excluded from heaven and from the number of the elect, and be sent to the everlasting fire of hell? Does not Our Lord say of Judas, who wished to be damned through his own fault, "It were better for him if that man had not been born"?<sup>1</sup> How then could it be true that God loves a man, and wishes well to him, when He creates him with the antecedent absolute will not to save him, but to condemn him to hell? I repeat that it is a grievous injustice and an absurd imputation on that infinitely good and loving Father of all souls, in which He not only sees reflected His own most beautiful image (and even the kings and princes of the world hold their own images in great honor), but which He has also redeemed with the blood of His own Son, and looks on as His lawfully purchased property.

He has  
given up  
His Son to a  
painful  
death for all:  
therefore  
He is will-  
ing to grant  
heaven to  
all.

This one consideration is enough for me, and it should suffice for any thinking man to hold it as certain that God has an earnest, antecedent will to save all men, if they only wish it. I cannot believe anything else when I think that God has suffered death for all men that they may be freed from eternal death. And is it not infallibly certain as an article of faith? "He that spared not even His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all,"<sup>2</sup> such are the words of St. Paul to the Romans. And what has not this Son endured for our salvation? It is easy to find a physician who will spare no pains, but watch day and night to secure the recovery of his patient. But where will you find one who, to help a stranger, will offer to endure prison and chains, shame and disgrace, pains and torments, nay, even death itself? Or if such a one could be found, would any one say that he was not in earnest about helping the man? God was not satisfied with doing His part in working for the welfare of men, but He also freely gave Himself up to pains and torments, to show clearly

constituiti vel fecisti. Pars enim omnibus, quoniam tua sunt, Domine, qui amas animas.—Wis. xi. 25, 27.

<sup>1</sup> Bonum erat ei, si natus non fuisset homo ille.—Matt. xxvi. 24.

<sup>2</sup> Qui etiam proprio filio suo non pepercit, sed pro nobis omnibus tradidit illum.—Rom. viii. 32.



that our eternal happiness is, as it were, dearer to Him than His own. Ah, my dearest Saviour, what hast Thou not suffered to bring me and other poor souls with Thee to heaven? Thou hast suffered from Thy own apostles and disciples, who abandoned, betrayed, and denied Thee. Thou hast suffered from the Jews, who conspired against Thee and Thy life. Thou hast suffered from spiritual and temporal judges, before whose tribunals Thou wast falsely accused, mocked, and condemned. Thou hast suffered from the soldiers, who cruelly scourged Thee with rods and whips, crowned Thee with sharp thorns, and derided Thee as a fool and simpleton. Thou hast suffered from Thy own most holy Mother, who standing at the foot of Thy cross on Calvary added to Thy pains by her own. Thou hast suffered even from Thy heavenly Father, who left Thee alone in a sea of sadness, and, as it were, wished to know Thee no longer. Thou hast suffered in temporal things, for Thou wast born, and didst live and die in extreme poverty. Thou hast suffered in Thy honor, for all the people looked on Thee as a deceiver and traitor. Thou hast suffered in Thy life, which thou didst offer up for us on the shameful gibbet of the cross. What do you think of all this, my dear brethren? How could the Son of God give clearer proof of His most earnest will to save us? What more could He do to evince His great desire for our eternal welfare than to suffer and die as He did to secure it? Or what can the heavenly Father be not ready to give us, after having sacrificed for us in such a manner His dearest and only-begotten Son, whose life is infinitely more worth than a hundred thousand heavens and eternal salvations? Shall He then refuse to give us heaven who has given us His only Son? that is, shall He refuse us a penny after having bestowed on us inexhaustible treasures and riches? This argument is not mine, but that of the great St. Paul, who says after the words already quoted: "How hath He not also, with Him, given us all things?"<sup>1</sup> As if to say: Fear not, O man! He who has given thee what is infinitely greater will not refuse thee what is infinitely less, if thou only wishest to have it. If the kingdom of heaven is compared with the Son of God, what else is it but the throne compared with the king? Now He who for love of you gave you the King, that you may rule for all eternity, will He refuse you the throne?

Most beautifully does St. Augustine develop this argument. *Confirmed*

<sup>1</sup> *Quomodo non etiam cum illo omnia nobis donavit?*—Rom. viii. 32.

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by St. Augustine.

“What a glorious pledge of our salvation we have received,” he exclaims; “we have the death of Christ; we have the blood of Christ in our hands. Let human weakness then be of good heart; let it not despair, or say: I shall not be saved. For what has God promised you, O mortal? That you should live with Him forever. Do you not believe that? Do you think it cannot come to pass if you wish for it? Believe it; believe it firmly, for He has already done more than He has promised. What has He done? He has died for you. What has He promised? That you shall live with Him. Now it seems more incredible that the eternal God should die than that mortal man should live forever. We are sure of the first, which seems the more incredible; can we then doubt of the latter?” So far St. Augustine.

The basis of Christian hope would be destroyed if God did not will all to be saved.

Finally, if God has not an earnest will to save all men, but, as Calvin and other heretics teach, only the predestined, that is, those whom God has, without any regard to their merits, selected for heaven from the great multitude of men, whom He rejects; and if, as the same heretics teach, Christ died for the predestined alone, then the whole foundation of Christian hope falls away, and no one is left any heart to do good and to work for heaven. For why should I take that trouble when I know not whether my labor will help me to get to heaven or not? I should not like, and should not dare to trust my life to a sailor, unless I am sure that he means to bring me into port, and that he does not intend to leave me to drown in the middle of the river. Nor could I place any hope or confidence in God as far as regards my salvation if I did not know whether He really desires, as far as He is concerned, to bring me to heaven or to send me to hell, without any regard to my good works. But that I could not know if it were true that, as far as He is concerned, God has not the earnest wish to save all men, but has rather determined by an antecedent will to damn the greater number; for in that case I should have far more reason not to hope than to hope for salvation. No; that cannot be true, for it is opposed to the evident promises of the Sacred Scripture, to the passion and death of Jesus Christ, to the goodness and mercy of our heavenly Father, to the basis of the Christian's hope, to the general belief of the true Catholic Church, in which alone salvation can be found, when she prays for all heretics and apostates: “Almighty and eternal God, who wishes to save all, and that no one should perish,” etc.

## *God's Earnest Wish to Save the Souls of Men.* 351

So it is, O Lord! Thou hast the earnest wish and desire that all men without exception should go to heaven; and therefore I too shall most certainly come to Thee in heaven if I only wish it and do not oppose Thy holy will. And for this I owe Thee infinite thanks, since Thou hast created me for such a noble end as to possess Thee one day in eternity. This is what comforts me during this short life in this miserable vale of tears: I can live forever in the kingdom of heaven, if I wish. On Thy part, O good God! I have nothing to fear, but rather reason to hope firmly that I shall gain heaven. What I have to fear is myself alone; namely, whether I shall constantly wish to obey Thy sweet law and to love Thee. I wish it now, O God! with Thy grace, which Thou wilt not refuse me. If I have hitherto acted against Thy will, and lost heaven, as I must, alas! acknowledge to have been the case only too often, it shall never again happen for all eternity. I will serve Thee, I will love Thee, I will do Thy holy will in all things to the end, as far as I know it; thus I shall surely, as Thou desirest and wishest, enjoy myself forever in heaven with Thee. Amen.

Consolation  
for those  
who wish to  
be saved,  
and resolution  
to serve  
God constantly.

*Another introduction to the same sermon for the third Sunday in Lent.*

### Text.

*Beati qui audiunt verbum Dei, et custodiunt illud.*—Luke xi. 28.

“Blessed are they who hear the word of God and keep it.”

### Introduction.

Rejoice, good Christians, who serve the Lord. “Blessed are they who hear the word of God and keep it.” That is, they who know the law and will of God and fulfil it. Here there is no exception; all, without distinction, who keep this law, and keep it constantly, shall attain eternal happiness. You are now endeavoring to keep it, and are firmly determined to persevere to the end, so that you are in the number of those, etc. *Continues as above.*

**SIXTY-FIFTH SERMON.**

**ON THE POWERFUL MEANS OF SALVATION THAT ALL MEN  
HAVE AT HAND.**

**Subject.**

The Almighty has prepared for all men, not only necessary and sufficient, but frequent, abundant, and, as far as He is concerned, efficacious graces and helps with which, if they wish to co-operate with them, they can easily gain heaven; therefore he who has the good will to serve God truly has nothing to fear in this respect.—*Preached on the sixth Sunday after Pentecost.*

**Text.**

*Accipiens septem panes, gratias agens, fregit, et dabat discipulis suis, ut apponerent, et apposuerent turbæ.*—Mark viii. 6.

“Taking the seven loaves, giving thanks He broke, and gave to His disciples for to set before them, and they set them before the people.”

**Introduction.**

Four thousand hungry people who wanted something to eat! What a number to provide for! Good reason had the disciples for exclaiming in astonishment when they considered the great crowd: “From whence can any one fill them here with bread in the wilderness?” Seven loaves and a few fishes, that was the whole provision. And yet the merciful, and at the same time almighty Lord, who did not wish to allow the people to suffer the pangs of hunger or to faint on the way, so increased the scanty supply that there was more than enough to still the hunger of the whole multitude. “They did eat and were filled,” says the Gospel; nay, so much food was there that they could not consume it all. “And they took up that which was left of the fragments, seven baskets.” There, my dear brethren, you have a figure and symbol of the care that the good God, who is so desirous of the salvation of all men, takes of their souls, that nothing may be wanting to them on the way to eternity. Many are called; not four thousand, but many, that is, in this place

all; all are called to follow Christ on this way. As we have seen already, God has an earnest wish and desire, and, as far as in Him lies, an efficacious one, that all men, without a single exception, should gain heaven. But where can so many millions find nourishment on the way thither? That is, where shall they find the means of attaining this end? Oh, let no one be anxious on this head! The almighty God, who loves us so much, knows how to provide for all, and that too not sparingly or in a niggardly fashion, as some think who confine the goodness of God within very narrow limits, but abundantly, as I shall now prove to the greater honor and glory of the divine will, that means so well to us and to our own consolation.

### Plan of Discourse.

*The Almighty has prepared for all men, not only necessary and sufficient, but frequent, abundant, and as far as He is concerned, efficacious graces and helps, and if they wish to co-operate with them, they can easily gain heaven. Therefore he who fails to save his soul must blame only himself; but he who has a good will to serve God faithfully need not fear on this head, but can rejoice in the Lord. Such is the whole subject.*

Give, O generous God! Thy graces in abundance to all here present; we ask this of Thee through the intercession of Mary and of our holy guardian angels.

It is a certain and undoubted article of the Catholic faith, following from the subject of the last sermon, that for all men, even for those who live in infidelity and heathenism, and for those who will be damned on account of their vicious lives, God has prepared necessary graces and sufficient means to work out their salvation if they only wish to co-operate with those graces. For if God has the earnest, sincere, and, as far as in Him lies, the efficacious will that all men should gain heaven, and no one be damned, then He must provide men with those means and graces without which it is impossible to gain heaven. Otherwise He would wish and require of men something that He well knows they cannot do; and it would be the same as to say to a blind man, without giving him the eyesight necessary for the purpose: I wish you to see; or to a lame man, without curing him: I wish you to walk straight; a vain wish, and a fruitless desire. Much less could the just and infinitely good

It is an article of faith that God gives to all men necessary and sufficient means of salvation.

Proved  
from Scrip-  
ture that He  
has pre-  
pared for all  
abundant,  
and, as far  
as in Him  
lies, effi-  
cacious  
graces.

God condemn to everlasting fire a man who could not keep His law because the necessary graces and helps were wanting to him.

No; we have in God a most generous Father, who is not satisfied with providing for His adopted children, whom He has created for heaven, merely those graces that are absolutely necessary for their salvation, but, as I wish to prove, He is ready to give to all men frequent, abundant, and, as far as their efficacy is concerned, most powerful graces and helps, with which they can easily, if they wish, merit heaven. The first proof of this I take from the word of God Himself, which cannot deceive us. St. James, in the first chapter of his Epistle, after having exhorted us to ask God for what we want, adds: "Who giveth to all men abundantly, and upbraideth not."<sup>1</sup> Mark those words: "to all men," without exception, the Lord gives His gifts and graces in abundance. St. Thomas of Aquin says: "God gives liberally, because He does not sell; He gives generally, because not to one alone, but to all; He gives abundantly, and not sparingly."<sup>2</sup> He does not say, as selfish men do: there, you have what I owe you; it is all you want; you can help yourself with that; but He bestows His graces in abundance, and gives us more than we want. For out of that immense ocean of wealth and goodness flow not a few drops, but whole streams and rivers, that run throughout the world and serve for the necessities of all men. In different parts of his Epistles, St. Paul says the same: "Charge the rich of this world not to be high-minded," so he writes to Timothy, "nor to trust in the uncertainty of riches, but in the living God (who giveth us abundantly all things to enjoy)."<sup>3</sup> He says "abundantly," and "all things," in which are included certainly not mere earthly goods, for there are many on earth who are in want of them, but much more the goods of the soul, which are of far greater importance. Again, writing to Titus he says: "According to His mercy He saved us, by the laver of regeneration and renovation of the Holy Ghost, whom He hath poured forth upon us abundantly through Jesus Christ, our Saviour,"<sup>4</sup> to the end "that being

<sup>1</sup> Qui dat omnibus affluenter, et non impropert. — James i. 5.

<sup>2</sup> Deus dat liberaliter, quia non vendit; dat generaliter, quia non uni, sed omnibus; dat abundanter, non parce.

<sup>3</sup> Divitibus hujus sæculi præcipe non sublime sapere, neque sperare in incerto divitiarum, sed in Deo vivo, qui præstat nobis omnia abunde ad fruendum. — I. Tim. vi. 17.

<sup>4</sup> Secundum suam misericordiam salvos nos fecit per lavacrum regenerationis et renovationis Spiritus Sancti, quem effudit in nos abunde per Jesum Christum Salvatorem nostrum. — Tit. iii. 5, 6.

justified by His grace, we may be heirs, according to hope, of life everlasting.”<sup>1</sup> And to the Romans: “The same is Lord over all, rich unto all that call upon Him.”<sup>2</sup> And to the Ephesians: “But God (who is rich in mercy), for His exceeding charity where with He loved us, . . . hath quickened us together in Christ, . . . that He might show . . . the abundant riches of His grace, in His bounty towards us in Christ Jesus.”<sup>3</sup> To whom does He wish to show the riches of His grace? To those whom He loved so much that Christ died for them. Therefore as Christ died for all men, He shows to all men the abundant riches of His grace. Hear how magnificently the apostles speak of the greatness and glory of the generous goodness of God in giving His graces and helps to enable us to reach heaven.

May any one then excuse his vicious life by blaming the parsimony of the Almighty, and saying that he had not grace, and therefore found it too hard to restrain his wicked passions, and keep the commandments with constancy? If so, then Our Lord did not speak the truth in the Gospel of St. Matthew, when He invited all men to serve Him: “Take up My yoke upon you, . . . and you shall find rest to your souls. For My yoke is sweet, and My burden light.”<sup>4</sup> In these words I find another proof of my proposition, that God gives frequent and abundant graces to all men, or at least is ready to give them in answer to prayer, so that men can easily, if they wish, gain heaven. To all men, I say, for He has invited all without exception to follow the law of His Gospel. Before His ascension into heaven He said to His apostles and their successors: “Go ye into the whole world and preach the Gospel to every creature.”<sup>5</sup> Hence the observance of the Gospel law, for which heaven is promised as an eternal reward, can and will be a sweet yoke and a light burden for all who wish. But how shall it be sweet and light? We cannot see that if we consider the Gospel law as it is in itself and in its own nature, for it is very difficult to our senses, and is opposed in nearly everything to our natural inclinations. Truly it is not an easy, but a difficult thing, to conquer one’s pas-

The yoke of Christ would not be sweet for all if God did not make it so by copious graces.

<sup>1</sup> Ut justificati gratia ipsius, hæredes simus secundum spem vitæ æternæ.—Tit. iii. 7.

<sup>2</sup> Idem Dominus omnium, dives in omnes qui invocant illum.—Rom. x. 12.

<sup>3</sup> Deus autem qui dives est in misericordia, propter nimiam charitatem suam qua dilexit nos . . . convivificavit nos in Christo, ut ostenderet abundantes divitias gratiæ suæ, in bonitate super nos in Christo Jesu.—Ephes. ii. 4, 5, 7.

<sup>4</sup> Tollite jugum meum super vos; et invenietis requiem animabus vestris. Jugum enim meum suave est, et onus meum leve.—Matt. xi. 29, 30.

<sup>5</sup> Euntes in mundum universum prædicate evangelium omni creature.—Mark xvi. 15.

sions to such an extent that, in spite of a natural repugnance, one loves his worst enemy from his heart, forgets all injuries received, acts in a friendly manner towards him, nay, even does him good. A hard and difficult thing to be high in honor and position before the world, and yet to remain little in one's own eyes and humble of heart. A hard and difficult thing to possess temporal goods and riches, and yet not let one's heart cleave to them, and to practise poverty of spirit. A difficult thing constantly to resist the desires of the flesh, and in spite of dangers and occasions never to consent even in thought to any of those pleasures to which we are so strongly inclined by our corrupt nature. A difficult thing to deny one's self, to keep a restraint on the outward senses, to mortify the flesh, to take up the cross daily, to bear all adversity with patience and contentment. A difficult thing to live in the midst of the world, and among men of the world, and yet not to follow the world and its customs. All this is commanded by the law of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Hence the words of Our Lord: "From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent bear it away."<sup>1</sup> Now if, in spite of this, the Gospel law is for all men a sweet yoke, a light burden, it must be made so by the frequent and great graces that God is willing to give to all who desire and wish for them. True, these graces do not take away all the difficulties at once, yet they enable him who works with them easily to overcome obstacles that in themselves are hard to deal with; they give him strength to mortify himself willingly, to do violence to himself with pleasure, and so easily to abstain from forbidden things.

That it comes hard to the sinner is not from the want of grace, but because he does not ask for grace. Shown by a simile.

To explain this. There lies a sick man in a violent fever; he is tormented with thirst, and knows not what to do; but he can be cured if he calls in the doctor, and is prepared to lose a few ounces of superfluous blood. He is forbidden to drink, and told that if he does not obey that command he will die. What do you think? Is that an easy or a hard thing for him? As long as the heat of the fever lasts and he suffers thirst, it is almost unbearable; if you put a cup of water near him, he cannot possibly refrain from drinking it; he will do what he can to get hold of it, and drink it up most eagerly. Whether I die or not, he says, I cannot stand this thirst any longer. On the other hand

<sup>1</sup> A diebus Joannis Baptistæ usque nunc regnum cœlorum vim patitur, et violenti rapiunt illud.—Matt. xi. 12.



it is easy enough for him to abstain from drinking if he uses the means prescribed; for what is easier than to call in the doctor and lose a little blood? When that is done the heat of the fever disappears, and the thirst is quenched of itself. So it is with a sinner. His fever is the vice to which he is addicted; the thirst is that violent inclination to that which God has forbidden under pain of eternal death. Tell the proud man that he must humble himself; the avaricious man not to love money; the unchaste man to renounce carnal lusts; the vindictive man to forgive his enemy; as long as the fever and thirst of desire last, he will answer: ah, I cannot; it is impossible! But tell him to beg humbly the help and grace of God, which God is ready to give him, and the heat of the desire will be moderated, and he will easily overcome difficulties that in themselves are grave enough. But if he refuses to employ that easy means, whom is he to blame for the insuperable difficulty he finds in keeping the commandments? Is he not himself in fault by his obstinacy in not asking the divine assistance, or not working with the graces given him, which would have made it easy for him to conquer his passions? as many know from their own experience, who having once made up their minds to serve God, have laid down the burden of their sins by a good confession. And these latter, like St. Augustine, are now filled with astonishment to see how easily they avoid sins that they before thought they could not possibly refrain from. Hence, if the law of the Gospel, that is in itself difficult, becomes, according to the assurance of Our Lord, a sweet yoke and a light burden, then it must be sweetened and lightened, not by small, weak, and barely necessary graces, but by great, copious, and superabundant ones. From which again it is clear that as all men are called to the sweet yoke and light burden of Jesus Christ, and it is to be sweet and light for all, that God has prepared, or is ready to prepare, for all men great, frequent, powerful, superabundant graces; and if men wish to co-operate with them, they shall easily be enabled to keep the Christian law, and therefore to gain heaven.

He is that Lord to whom the Catholic Church prays: "O God! of whose mercy there is no number, and the treasure of whose goodness is infinite." He acts with us as a rich and noble father with his eldest son, who is to inherit all his possessions. If he sends his son into a foreign land, how does he equip him for the journey? A mean garment would do to clothe his body for a

God treats  
us mortals  
as a rich  
father does  
his children.

whole year; his youthful strength would enable him to travel on foot from one town to the other; fifty or sixty pounds would suffice for his support for a year and prevent him from dying of hunger; but this would not be enough for one of such noble birth, nor would it be becoming his dignity. No; far different preparations are made on the occasion; a tutor is sent with him to keep a constant eye on him and take care of his welfare; he has one, two, or more servants to wait on him; many costly suits of clothes are given him to wear; horses and carriages are in waiting to bring him away; letters of credit are sent to all parts that he may have money enough and not be obliged to live sparingly, but may rather keep up the state and magnificence and enjoy the pleasures becoming his condition. Such is the manner in which the great Monarch of heaven, our infinitely rich and generous Father, dispenses His grace to His children, whom He has created for the sole purpose of making them heirs to His kingdom, and who are travelling in a foreign land here on earth.

With great  
generosity  
He cares for  
unreason-  
ing things  
for our use.

This magnificent generosity He shows even to unreasoning and senseless creatures, although He has made them only for the use of His children. How liberally and abundantly He provides wild beasts with all that is necessary to preserve their lives according to their different kinds! There is no living thing so small and mean that does not know where to find its certain food and nourishment; if it is sick, it knows where to look for medicine; if it is persecuted by another, it has arms to defend itself, or means of taking to flight, so that it may either protect itself or avoid its foe. The trees and all plants have numbers of little veins by which they absorb the sap that they require as nourishment according to their different natures; the winds, the dews, the rains, the sun-light, and nearly all the heavenly bodies attend on their wants, to provide them with heat, or cold, or drought, or moisture, or light, or shade at different times, as their preservation and growth require. How beautifully the earth is adorned with meadows and forests, with mountains and valleys, with streams and rivers, that it may serve, not only as the necessary, but as a comfortable and pleasant dwelling for man! And what is most surprising, this vast, ponderous globe hangs in mid-air, in which even a feather could not remain for a moment without falling to the ground; and it hangs there so immovably that for the last six thousand years and more it has not moved either to

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the right or the left, supported by the careful providence of God alone.

And what are we to think of the human body, which is justly called a little world? What a number of different members it has to perform its actions, not with difficulty, and only as far as necessity requires, but with ease, comfort, and pleasure, when, where, and how it pleases. God has given it eyes to see with, that it may behold the beauties of the world and know its fellows; He has provided those eyes with covers, that when they do not wish to see they may shut themselves up and remain hidden; He has given it feet that it may be able to move from one place to the other according as it wishes; hands, that it may defend itself when necessary, work, and support itself; a voice and speech that it may make known its hidden thoughts and the secrets of its heart; ears, that it may understand the speech of others. Everything that the wide world holds and produces is for its use and enjoyment: the rivers and springs bring it water; the sea, its pearls; the mountains, different metals; the fields, corn; the trees, fruit; the gardens, flowers and vegetables; animals, their skins, fleeces, and meat; birds, their feathers. All these things provide the body with food, clothing, care, not merely as far as is necessary, but liberally and abundantly; they serve, too, as medicine in sickness, as means of innocent enjoyment and pleasure in health, so that many a one imagines that he has his paradise and a heaven of joys in the different delights that the generosity of God has prepared for the body and its senses. And all these blessings are distributed so carefully, and in such wonderful abundance that there is no people under the sun so barbarous that they do not find in nature all they require for the food, nourishment, and lawful recreation of the body.

Now if God is so generous to all His creatures, so munificent in providing the means necessary for a merely natural end, could any one suspect Him of being parsimonious only to men, and of giving them the graces and gifts necessary for their salvation in such a small and niggardly way as to enable them to attain their last end, that is, heaven, only with difficulty and great exertion? Does God then show greater love and care for dumb animals, nay, for senseless and lifeless things, than for the immortal souls that He has made to His own image, and that Jesus Christ has appointed heirs of the heavenly kingdom? Is the heavenly Father more generous and liberal to the trees and plants

He provides the human body in a most abundant manner.

How much more generously will He not endow the soul with the means of attaining its last end.

than to His own children? more careful of the creatures that are made solely for the use of man than of man himself, who is the end, the lord and master of all creatures? Eh! that would be a stain on the noblest of the divine perfections, love and goodness, which would in that case pour itself out on the vilest and most abject things, while it is quite indifferent to the most precious and beautiful, man's immortal soul. And shall God be more careful of and generous to the human body, which is after all only a tool and servant of the soul, a dwelling in which the latter is to work out its salvation, than to the soul itself, which is the master and lord of the dwelling?

And that  
bessems His  
goodness  
and glory.

That would be like a rich prince, who builds a splendid palace for his heir, furnishes it with the most costly carpets, clothes the servants and lackeys in gold and silver, fills the barns with corn, the cellars with wine, the kitchen with food, the stables with horses, and all in abundance, while he allows his son, the lord of all this magnificence, and the heir to his kingdom, to go about half naked, and beg his bread to save himself from dying of hunger. If a supposition of the kind is so absurd that one would not dare to affirm it of any sensible man, how much less should it be affirmed of the God of infinite wisdom, riches, and goodness? Therefore, either He is not the God described in the Holy Scripture and recognized by our own reason, or else if He is such as we know and adore Him, He cannot be less generous to souls whom He has redeemed with His blood, shedding it to the last drop for them (although that was not necessary for their salvation, since one drop would have sufficed)—He certainly cannot be less generous to them than to other creatures whom He has made only for the service of souls. Hence, as He is, so to speak, prodigal towards the latter in providing them with means to attain their end, He will also, and in a far greater degree, show His munificence and liberality in giving to souls the graces and helps they require to enable them easily to work out their salvation, if they only wish to do so.

Experi-  
ence tells us  
that graces  
and helps to  
salvation  
are given in  
superabun-  
dance.

And why should we require arguments to convince us of this, since we know it already by experience. For who shall count the graces and helps that the Catholic Church possesses in such abundance to make her children holy, to free them from sin, to preserve them in grace, to deter them from evil, to instruct them in good, and so to bring them to heaven? How many churches there are which are open every day to encourage our

devotion? How many holy sacrifices in which the flesh and blood of Jesus are daily offered to the heavenly Father as an infinite thanksgiving for all benefits received, an infinite atonement for all sin committed, and as a means of obtaining all the blessings we stand in need of? How many sacraments, by the worthy reception of which we can, as often as we please, increase sanctifying grace, and obtain more actual graces? How many indulgences, which the Catholic Church so freely bestows out of the treasury of the merits of Christ and His saints, by which we can wipe out the debt of punishment that still remains due for our sins? How many spiritual books that we may read, how many sermons that we may hear, how many explanations of Christian doctrine that we may attend? All these are intended to enlighten our ignorance, to impress on our minds the fear and love of God, to encourage us to do good, to arouse in our hearts a desire of heavenly things, and, as it were, to force us with violence into heaven. How many public devotions, in which with the assembled people we can unanimously praise God, and with united voices implore help in our needs; devotions of which Our Lord has said: "If two of you shall consent upon earth, concerning anything whatsoever they shall ask, it shall be done to them by My Father who is in heaven. For where there are two or three gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them."<sup>1</sup> How many examples of the wicked to deter us from sin, of those good and zealous Christians who are still alive and of the holy citizens of heaven to spur us on to imitate their zeal, their virtues, and their holiness of life? How many priests, missionaries, pastors of souls, convents, and monasteries of religious who are all prepared to absolve the penitent sinner, to strengthen others in temptation, to console the afflicted, to give counsel to the doubtful? How many ways and means the Catholic Church has invented of helping the healthy, the sick, those who are in prison, and the dying, that they may save their souls?

To say nothing of the holy inspirations, illuminations, knowledge, that God and His angels give the human heart that we do not see and are not aware of! So that it is quite amazing that with such superfluous means of salvation a single individual

Even the greatest sinners must acknowledge that

<sup>1</sup> Si duo ex vobis consenserint super terram de omnire, quaecumque petierint, fiet illis a Patre meo, qui in caelis est. Ubi enim sunt duo vel tres congregati in nomine meo, ibi sum in medio eorum.—Matt. xviii. 19, 20.

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grace is not  
wanting to  
them.
 
 should yet be lost. Ah, cries out St. Chrysostom, how many ways we have to lead us to heaven! <sup>1</sup> Blind mortals that we are! if we only made a good use of the hundredth part of the **graces** and means at our disposal! Nay, if many a one employed for his salvation the hundredth part of the labor and trouble he takes to lose his soul, there would be hardly one excluded from heaven. Ask any Christian, even the most abandoned, even one who is buried head and ears in vice, if he has not experienced during his life that he has received thousands of benefits from the good God; if he has not felt thousands of **graces**, opportunities, secret impulses, and movements of the heart to return to God and do penance; if, in spite of the persistency with which he kept away from sermons, lest he should hear something to make him uneasy, he has not often felt the sting of remorse. And if he wishes to speak the truth he must say: ah, yes! I cannot deny it. Ask him further whether he can honestly say that God is to blame for his not having led a better life, if grace has been wanting to him, and therefore if the fault of his vices and sins can be attributed to the parsimony with which God treated him. Again he must answer, if he wishes to speak the truth: no; but I did not wish to profit by grace. And the same will be the confession of the second sinner, of the third, the fourth, the hundredth, the thousandth, and of all of them, no matter who they are.

So that they  
who are lost  
must blame  
themselves,  
and them-  
selves  
alone.
 
 In a word, let others fight and argue with each other as long as they choose about eternal predestination to heaven; it still remains and must remain true for all men who are shut out of heaven, because it is the infallible word of God Himself, what the Lord says by the Prophet Osee: "Destruction is thy own, O Israel! thy help is only in Me;" <sup>2</sup> your eternal damnation, O man! whoever you be, comes from yourself, because you did not wish to save your soul; Me, alone have you to thank for those **graces** that I offered you, not sparingly, but liberally and in abundance to work out your salvation, if you had only been willing to do so!

Resolution  
to work  
with God's  
grace.
 
 Yes, O most good and generous God! we acknowledge this to be the case. We confess, to the greater glory of Thy infinite mercy, that in dispensing Thy **graces** and helps to make us eternally happy Thou hast been, so to speak, more lavish than gen-

<sup>1</sup> Quot sunt ad salutem viæ!

<sup>2</sup> Perditio tua Israel; tantummodo in me auxillium tuum.—Osee xlii. 9.

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erous; that Thou hast given us far more than Thou wert bound to give, more than we deserved, more than was necessary for our salvation! If I, poor sinner that I am, am lost forever, then I must ascribe my damnation to no one but myself, to my own disobedient, obstinate, wicked will! If I come to Thee in heaven, as I hope and trust, then I shall praise Thy goodness forever because it has given in abundance to me and to all men the graces by which to work out our salvation and gain heaven. I am only sorry and grieved beyond measure (I humbly acknowledge my guilt!) that I have hitherto been lazy and slothful in working with Thy graces, which Thou hast granted me so freely; nay, I have often closed my eyes to them and to the known light, and have obstinately loved the darkness! In future I shall make a better and more zealous use of them, and lose no opportunity, at least willingly and deliberately, of increasing in my soul sanctifying grace and my eternal happiness that follows from it by good works. Before all the world I will give testimony that Thou art the God “who giveth to all men abundantly;” of whose mercy there is no end, whose goodness and generosity have neither measure nor limit. And that very goodness shall be a spur to make me love Thee with my whole heart above all things, and to serve constantly such a kind Father with childlike confidence and joy of heart, with a sure hope of once loving Thee in Thy kingdom of heaven, which Thou hast promised me. Amen.

*Another introduction to the same sermon for the fourth Sunday in Lent.*

**Text.**

*Cum gratias egisset, distribuit discumbentibus.*—John vi. 11.

“When He had given thanks, He distributed to them that were sat down.”

**Introduction.**

Five thousand hungry people who were in want of something to eat! What a number to provide for! Good reason had Philip to exclaim, when he considered the number of people: “Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one may take a little.” And all the food they had was five barley loaves and two fishes; so that Andrew asked: “What are these among so many?” Yet the merciful, and at the same time

omnipotent Lord, who did not wish to see any of them perishing of hunger, knew how to increase that small provision, so that all received a share of it, and that too in abundance, so that not only was their hunger stilled, but they had “as much as they would.” Nay, after they were filled, twelve basketfuls remained of the fragments of the food. See there, my dear brethren, a figure, etc. *Continues as above.*

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*SIXTY-SIXTH SERMON.*

**ON THE SUFFICIENT THOUGH UNEQUAL GRACES FOR SALVATION THAT ARE GIVEN TO ALL MEN.**

**Subject.**

1. In what manner have all men abundant means of gaining heaven? 2. Why have not all men the same means of gaining heaven?—*Preached on the twelfth Sunday after Pentecost.*

**Text.**

*Quid faciendo vitam æternam possidebo? . . . Diliges Dominum Deum tuum ex toto corde tuo.*—Luke x. 25, 27.

“What must I do to possess eternal life? . . . Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart.”

**Introduction.**

A very beautiful and necessary question: “what must I do to possess eternal life?” This question should touch the hearts of all men, because all, without exception, are created for eternal life. A short answer embracing the whole divine law was given to the question: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind, and thy neighbor as thyself.” This again holds good for all men, not one excepted; all must love their God with their whole heart and their neighbor as themselves; for such is the will and desire of God, who, as far as in Him lies, earnestly wishes all men to be saved. And all can love God and their neighbor in that way, for no one is without the graces and helps, which the divine generosity has prepared for all in abundance and plenty, as I have already shown. Meanwhile there are people who indulge in curious thoughts



and speculations regarding this truth, and doubt whether the goodness of God reaches in this sense to all men; thus they represent the divine goodness and liberality as not so great or loveable as is befitting. Against these I shall in this sermon defend the honor and glory of the general love and mercy of God. From the many doubts that might assail us on this point I select only two, to which nearly all the others may be reduced.

### Plan of Discourse.

*The first is: not all men seem to have frequent graces to gain heaven. The second: not all men have equal helps to gain heaven. Why is that? Both these questions I shall now answer; the first in the first and longer part; the other, in the second part. The fruit of this instruction shall be a just appreciation and love of the general goodness of God, and the acknowledgment of the great obligation incumbent on us Catholics before so many other men to work out our salvation with zeal. If we make a resolution to this latter effect, every one shall profit largely by this sermon.*

This depends, too, on Thy light and grace, O God of goodness! which we beg of Thee through the intercession of Mary and of our holy guardian angels.

Let us see now how one can accuse the divine goodness of parsimony in distributing graces and helps to men to aid them to gain heaven. Here our thoughts are inclined to wander to other parts of the world—to Asia, Africa, America. And we think: how many millions of incredulous heathens, Moors, barbarians, savages there are in those countries, who know nothing whatever of the true God, of the eternal kingdom of heaven, or of the divine law and faith. How many almost unknown islands there are in the East Indies, where men live like the brute beast, where a Catholic priest seldom or never comes to instruct them in what concerns divine things and their eternal salvation. Alas! these poor people too have immortal souls, created for eternity, and redeemed by the precious blood of Jesus Christ. But what are they to do? “He that believeth not shall be condemned,”<sup>1</sup> such is the sentence pronounced by Our Lord. But how can those people believe when they know nothing of the true faith? And how can they know anything of it when

Many heathen and unknown nations seem to have no means of salvation.

<sup>1</sup> Qui vero non crediderit condemnabitur.—Mark xvi. 16.

the Gospel is hardly ever preached to them? There they are, then, created indeed and called to heaven, but without a guide, without grace or help to gain heaven; must they not then be lost forever? Such is the objection that arises in the mind of many a simple soul, and makes him doubt of the goodness of God as far as all men are concerned.

We Christians have then all the more cause to love God; yet those others are not necessarily shut out of heaven.

There are two points in this objection that have to be answered. Granted that there are nations in the world who have heard nothing of the true faith and the law of Christ—although as soon as a new country is discovered Catholic priests and missionaries are generally sent thither to preach the Gospel to the inhabitants—yes, indeed, those poor people are to be pitied! And we are bound to return infinite thanks to the great God for the abundant light He has granted us in preference to them; and therefore we to us if in the clear light of day we do not work zealously for our salvation! For to whom more is given, from him more is expected. There can be no doubt about that. But that those nations who have never had the Gospel preached to them, if there are such, are deprived and excluded from a share in the divine graces and helps by which they may, if they wish, save their souls and gain heaven, and that therefore they must be lost forever: that is not true by any means.

God gives them, in a way unknown to us, sufficient means of salvation.

For in the first place I think to myself: if storks, swallows, and other birds know instinctively how to find their way, although no one has taught them, across the high seas into those warm countries where they remain during the winter, and are able to return again at the beginning of spring; if the bees without a master are able to find the flowers from which they suck the honey; if stags, bears, dogs, cats, and almost all other animals can find without a master healing herbs when they are sick, to restore themselves to health; if the rivers can find the sea, and all the elements their centre and point of rest, to which without any guide they are borne of themselves and by a natural inclination, and in which they finally repose: who can believe that there should be so many men on earth who know nothing of their God, or of their last end, or of the means by which they may attain it? And again I think: if no country is so remote, so wild and barbarous as not to receive the benefit of the sun, the stars, the winds, rains, and other things that are necessary for the preservation of the life of the body, who can believe that the means of saving the everlasting life of the immortal

soul should alone be wanting to it? If all men, even in the wilds of heathendom, have their guardian angels at their side, to protect, guide, and keep them, who can believe that these angels do not, according to their office, give the souls entrusted to them the inspirations necessary for their salvation? If Jesus Christ suffered and died for the salvation of all men, who can believe that He will not also give to all that without which His blood and life would be sacrificed in vain? If God earnestly desires the eternal happiness of all men, and does not wish that any one should be lost, who can believe that He will not give them all the means, and even extraordinary ones, in a way known only to Himself, without which they could not work out their salvation, but must be lost forever? No; there is no doubt of it; even the most savage nations, hitherto unknown to the rest of the world, if there are such, have means enough to know their God, to love their God, to keep the law of their God, to attain to the light of the true faith, and thus, if they wish, to gain heaven.

How so? In what manner? Mark what I am about to say: By the consideration of creatures they can and must know and love God. no one is so stupid, so ignorant, and rude as not to know, when he sees a beautiful, well-built, magnificent house, that there must have been a master who built it. There is no one who hears from afar the delightful harmony of many voices and musical instruments, who does not think that there must be some one who is the author of that music. There is no one who sees a body move itself, walk, stand, speak, eat, drink, who does not know that such a body has a soul and life in it. Yet he has not seen the soul, the musician, or the architect with his bodily eyes, nor has any one told him about them. Thus we must hold it as indubitably certain that there is no man that has come to the use of reason, either in Europe, Asia, Africa, or America, even if he were quite alone wandering about in a wilderness, who when he beholds the earth, the sky, and himself, does not arrive at the knowledge that there is a sovereign Lord and Master who has made this beautiful world, and governs it in its wonderful order and constant regularity, although he has not been told anything of this Master; and this knowledge is enough with the sole light of reason to move and impel him to acknowledge that this sovereign Lord and Ruler should be honored, feared, and loved. Hence the question whether an inculpable ignorance of God is possible in a reasoning man is answered by nearly all theologians as follows: such ignorance in one who has arrived at

the use of reason cannot exist, at least for any length of time; for every one is brought to the knowledge of the Creator by the consideration of created things; and if the Supreme Being is not known by the name of God, yet He has some other title which inspires reverence, and suggests that obedience and submission are due to Him.

Shown from  
Scripture.

That this is the teaching of theologians appears clearly from Holy Writ, for the Apostle says, writing to the Romans about the heathens who have no law and know no Gospel, and therefore adore stocks and stones, birds and four-footed beasts, dragons and serpents as their gods: "That which is known of God is manifest in them." But who has told them of it, great Apostle? "For God hath manifested it unto them," is the answer. How so? God has never been preached to them. They need no preaching; "for the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made; His eternal power also, and divinity; so that they are inexcusable. Because that, when they knew God, they have not glorified Him as God, or given thanks, but became vain in their thoughts, and their foolish heart was darkened . . . and they worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator."<sup>1</sup> Hence there is no excuse for them, and if they are damned they must ascribe it to their own wilful blindness.

The light of  
reason  
shows them  
the com-  
mandments  
and how to  
keep them.

Besides this knowledge of God, and the obligation of honoring, loving, and praying to Him that is learned from creatures, reason itself teaches almost all the other commandments of God that are now prescribed, and how they should be kept. For just as the first principle of nature tells us that we must preserve our lives as long as we can, and every one, without further reasoning or teaching, at once understands and acknowledges that he must eat, drink, sleep, defend himself when attacked: so there is no reasoning being who does not at once recognize that first fundamental law impressed on us by nature itself: "Do unto others as you would wish them to do to you;" he knows that he must honor his parents, do no wrong to any one, inflict pain on no one without just cause, slay no one unless he is

<sup>1</sup> Quod notum est Dei, manifestum est in illis; Deus enim illis manifestavit. Invisibilia enim ipsius a creatura mundi per ea quæ facta sunt intellecta conspiciuntur, sempiterna quoque ejus virtus et divinitas. Ita ut sint inexcusabiles. Quia cum cognovissent Deum, non sicut Deum glorificaverunt, aut gratias egerunt, sed evanuerunt in cogitationibus suis, et obscuratum est insipiens cor eorum . . . et coluerunt, et servierunt creature, potiusquam Creatori.—Rom. i. 19 - 21, 25.

forced to do it, rob no one, and so on. And he who does any of those bad things, although he is quite alone and has no one on earth to fear, although he knows nothing of any express command, yet he will at once feel the biting tooth of remorse, and a secret fear that says to his heart he has done wrong; thus he knows he must avoid such actions. Hence even in the remotest islands of the world there is no one ignorant of God and of His general law.

But, you will say, how can that knowledge help those poor people to eternal happiness? for they are not baptized, and do not belong to the true Church, and so cannot hope for salvation, according to the express words of Our Lord: "He that believeth not shall be condemned" (words that are to be understood of those who have the use of reason). St. Thomas of Aquin and other theologians answer this question as follows: If one belonging to a savage nation, after having learned to know God, lives according to the natural law, and does and avoids what his reasoning and conscience tell him to do and avoid, the good God will infallibly help him, even by a miracle, if necessary, to the light of the true faith, and to baptism, if not of water, at least of desire; just, so speaks the Angelic Doctor, as He sent Peter to Cornelius, Paul to the Macedonians, Philip to the eunuch of Queen Candace; so that those people were miraculously instructed in the faith, and baptized. In the same manner Father Joseph Anchieta of the Society of Jesus, missionary in Brazil, while on a journey of some hundreds of miles, was brought into a forest, where he found an old gray-haired heathen a hundred years old. He examined this man, and found that during his life he had never offended God by a grievous sin. When asked why he did not do this or that after the example of his fellows, he answered: Because I knew it was wrong. As soon as he was instructed in the Christian faith, and baptized, this innocent man gave up his now sanctified soul into the hands of his Maker. So careful is the good God of those who live according to reason, and do what they can not to be excluded from heaven.

And if they keep them, God will, even by a miracle, bring them to the true faith.

Moreover, in addition to the general and sufficient means given by reason to all men to know and love their Creator, and thus save their souls, who can doubt that the God of love, who has loved all souls even to the death of the cross, will, in the case of savage races, supply the want of the graces that He has

God makes up, by Himself or His angels, the want of other means of salvation.

<sup>1</sup> Qui vero non crediderit, condemnabitur.—Mark xvi. 16.

granted so liberally to us in Christendom that we may save our souls with ease, if we wish—that He will replace those graces by extraordinary inspirations given by Himself directly, or by the holy angels whom He has deputed to attend on those people as their guides to heaven, by interior admonitions and movements of the heart? We have experience of the wonderful care of the divine providence and goodness in creating natural means to preserve the bodily life of man. “Every land does not bring forth everything,”<sup>1</sup> is an old saying of the poets, and it is true; for not every country can produce all that is serviceable for human life and nourishment. And yet there is no land in which the want of one thing is not supplied by something else that performs the same service. In some islands of the East, as we learn from the letters of our missionary Fathers, there grows neither wine, nor corn, nor other crop of the kind; but there are trees that bring forth a fruit that serves as bread and drink. In some there is neither winter nor cold weather, but the intolerable heat of the air is tempered by a cool breeze from time to time. In many parts of Europe where wood is wanting the earth produces coal, or else straw in great size and abundance, which amply supplies the want of wood for making fires. In Egypt it never rains, as the sky is always clear, and there are no clouds; what do the people do? Divine Providence knows how to replace the want of rain; for at stated times in summer the Nile overflows its banks from some cause or other not yet discovered, pours itself out over the fields, and by its inundation renders the land uncommonly fertile. The world has daily experience of countless similar cases. Are we then wrong in saying that the good God is just as careful to supply for the graces that seem wanting in certain cases, graces that are necessary for the immortal souls that He has created for heaven alone? He is the God who calls Himself the true Light “which enlighteneth every man that cometh into this world.”<sup>2</sup> Is He likely to be more careful of bodies than of immortal souls? Can we imagine Him not to be able or willing, or not to know how to touch with His supernatural light and powerful grace, the hearts of even the most abandoned and helpless men, and to draw them to Himself? He is a God of infinite wisdom; then He must know how, and find opportunities enough to do that. He is a God of infinite power;

<sup>1</sup> Non omnis fert omnia tellus.

<sup>2</sup> Quæ illuminat omnem hominem venientem in hunc mundum.—John 1. 9.

then He is able to do it. He is a God of infinite goodness, liberality, and mercy, who, as far as in Him lies, wishes earnestly the salvation of all men; therefore He is also willing to do it. Although we may not see or understand how it is done, yet there can be no doubt about it.

There are several wonderful mysteries that are far above our grasp; and yet they are in themselves infallibly true. For instance, we do not understand how it is that the sea ebbs and flows at different times, yet it is an undoubted fact that such is the case. We do not know and cannot see how and in what manner God speaks to the hearts of the wildest heathens, and gives them His light and copious graces, but we shall know all about it on that day when, as St. Paul says, the Lord will disclose the most hidden things, and reveal before all men the secrets of hearts. Then we shall find that to be true which Our Lord foretells in the Gospel of St. Matthew: "Many shall come from the east and the west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven."<sup>1</sup> Then we shall see what St. John saw long ago, as we read in the Apocalypse: "A great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and tribes, and peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne."<sup>2</sup> Hence there is no nation in the world so wild and uncultivated that many of its people shall not gain heaven, and hence there is none that the good God does not richly provide with the means of salvation. "Brethren," says St. Augustine, concluding his remarks on this question, "let us prostrate ourselves and adore the Lord who made us; for He would not have made us if He did not care to preserve us."<sup>3</sup> So much for the first point. I now go on to the second point in the

Although we cannot understand how it is done.

## Second Part.

But, others will say, if God wills the salvation of all men, why does He not give to all equally powerful means of salvation, that they may all save their souls with the same facility? It is certain, no matter how we consider the matter, that we Catholics in this country have far more light and knowledge, and more

God does no one an injustice by giving more graces to some than to others.

<sup>1</sup> Multi venient ab oriente et occidente, et recumbent cum Abraham et Isaac et Jacob in regno coelorum.—Matt. viii. 11.

<sup>2</sup> Turbam magnam quam dinumerare nemo poterat, ex omnibus gentibus et tribubus, et populis, et linguis, stantes ante thronum.—Apoc. vii. 9.

<sup>3</sup> Adoremus, fratres, et prosternamur ante Dominum qui fecit nos; non enim curavit facere, et non curat custodire.

convenient means and opportunities of doing good and gaining heaven easily, than those wild people who live in heathenism and infidelity, and Turks and heretics who do not live among Catholics. And even among Catholics it is again certain that God gives some more, others fewer graces, so that the former conquer their passions with ease, and the latter only with great difficulty, in order to gain heaven. Further, it is probable that if many who are now in hell had such great graces as many of the saints received, they would also have become holy and be now in heaven; whence that difference? "O man! who art thou that repliest against God?"<sup>1</sup> I must say with St. Paul. Poor mortal, how can you dare to scrutinize the hidden decrees of the Almighty, and to ask your God why He does this or that, and acts in this or that way, and not otherwise? Is it not enough for you that He has given you His graces and helps, and that too in abundance, so that, if you will, you can gain His eternal kingdom? What is it to you that He has given more or less to others? "Take what is thine and go thy way," is the answer He Himself gives you in the parable of the laborers, some of whom complained that they who had come late to work received the same pay as themselves, who had toiled the whole day. I do you no wrong; "or, is it not lawful for Me to do what I will? Is thy eye evil because I am good?"<sup>2</sup>

Shown by a  
smile.

Let us imagine that a rich king publishes that whoever comes to his palace on a certain day shall receive a thousand pounds, and he has fixed on a day to suit all, even those who live at the greatest distance. To some he sends a coach to convey them to his court, to others a horse, that they may ride thither; for others who live by the sea he sends boats, and for others who are strong enough he sends only a guide to show them the way. Now if those latter wished to complain and say: why must I walk while those others ride? I should also like to sit in a coach and thus travel more comfortably. Why must I weary myself journeying on foot? Eh! the king might say to him; who asked you to come at all? I am so good as to offer you a thousand pounds that I do not owe you; if you do not want them, stay at home! But if I give others a more comfortable way of coming for the money, I do you no wrong, and show you no disfavor; it

<sup>1</sup> O homo, tu quis es, qui respondeas Deo?—Rom. ix. 20.

<sup>2</sup> Tolle quod tuum est, et vade. Aut non licet mihi quod volo facere? an oculus tuus nequam est, quia ego bonus sum?—Matt. xx. 14, 15.



should suffice for you that you may have all that money, if you only wish to come and take it. My opinion is, my dear brethren, that in such a case no one would complain of the difference made; but every one would willingly undertake on foot a journey of a whole day. There is what the King of heaven does with us. He calls and invites all men to His kingdom, there to possess a treasure of delights if they only wish to come for it. Those who have received greater graces, travel, as we imagine, in a coach to heaven; others, who have received fewer graces, as we believe, although we cannot be certain of that, have greater difficulty in making the journey, and must go on foot. Supposing such to be the case, why has God so ordained? Why have some more graces than others? But that is not the question we should ask. We should rather inquire: why do I not use the graces that the Lord has given me for my salvation? Every day I have many beautiful opportunities of doing good and adding to my merit; why am I not more diligent in profiting of them? That is the only question that deserves our attention. But why God gives more to one than to another He alone knows, and it is not for me to inquire into His secrets.

Yet to throw a little light on this matter, I say that this difference of graces is most justly ordained by God. Every creature, says St. Thomas of Aquin, is an exemplar or copy of the divine perfections; but as no one creature can in itself represent all those perfections, which are infinite, the wisdom of Providence has decreed that there should be a difference between creatures, so that the one may represent what the other does not. Among so many millions of men you will hardly find two who resemble each other in all respects; each one has something to distinguish him in color, face, or manner. Therefore God has appointed different states and modes of life for men; one must be rich, the other poor; one is married, the other single; one is a priest, another a man of the world, another a servant, and so on. And this distinction of classes is necessary for the preservation of the world, as I have shown in detail on a former occasion. The same order must be observed in the distribution of graces and supernatural goods, which are dispensed in different ways according to the states and conditions of men. The religious has one grace, the layman another; the poor man has a different grace from the rich man; but all this is so admirably arranged that the grace given to each one

There is  
good reason  
for that in-  
equality.

is that which is best suited to his condition to enable him to work out his salvation with more ease.

Shown by a  
smile.

Just as it happens with a large army of soldiers; all do not receive the same arms, but are differently equipped, according to the regiment they belong to, or the duties they have to perform. Some are provided with swords, others with sabres, others with lances, others with muskets, others with grenades; some are foot-soldiers, others belong to the cavalry; some are cuirassiers, others dragoons; yet all are so ordered that each one is best able to fight and gain the victory with the arms allotted him. Now what the different arms are to the soldiers, that the different graces and gifts are to us mortals. Therefore to ask why God did not give to Judas the grace He gave to Peter is as wise as to ask the emperor why he does not give his foot-soldiers the same arms as the cavalry have. Each man must be satisfied when he has the weapons that are best suited for defence and attack, according to his duty and rank. If the soldier throws down his arms, refuses to fight, and is slain, not the general who allotted him his arms to defend himself is to blame, but the soldier himself. If I reject the grace given me by God, and refuse to make use of it for my salvation, although I can easily profit by it, then I cannot blame God, but He can blame me.

Hence God  
is just and  
generous in  
giving His  
grace to all  
men; but  
we Chris-  
tians are all  
the more  
bound to  
serve Him  
with zeal.

So it is, O Lord! "Thou art just, O Lord! and Thy judgment is right." No one can find fault with Thee, no one complain that Thou art parsimonious; all of us have graces and means enough, graces and means in abundance to work out our salvation and come to Thee in heaven. We humbly adore, praise, and magnify Thy liberality, and indeed we have special cause to do so, for we are amongst those to whom, in Thy just decrees, Thou hast given grace in far greater abundance than to many other nations! And wo to us if we Catholics, living in this land, do not come to Thee in heaven! What a hell will be ours! If even heathens and barbarians living in the remotest islands cannot with reason complain that they are abandoned by Thee and Thy grace, if they must ascribe their damnation to themselves alone: what excuse shall we have, if we do not profit by the copious and frequent graces given for our salvation? Wo to us if, as Thou hast said, many shall come from the east and the west, and shall sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while we, the children of the kingdom, are cast

<sup>1</sup> *Iustus es, Domine, et rectum iudicium tuum.*—Ps. cxviii. 137.

out into exterior darkness! if many heathens who have, with the sole light of reason, lived better according to Thy commandments than we, shall be our judges, and condemn us! O my God! when I consider this I know not whether I should be more terrified at Thy goodness, which daily heaps so many graces on me, or at Thy strict justice. For, great as is my hope in the mercy Thou hast shown me, equally great is my fear, on account of my sloth in profiting of Thy favors and helps. Ah, how will it be with me on that day if Thou wilt reproach me and complain of me! "What is the meaning that My beloved hath wrought much wickedness in My house?"<sup>1</sup> In the midst of the fire thou didst not become warm; in the clear light of My day thou hast deliberately closed thy eyes, and didst not wish to see. Ah, my God! what answer shall I make Thee? This consideration shall in future urge me to greater compunction of heart and detestation of my past sins, and to more zeal and constancy in Thy service; so that after having, at least during the remainder of my life, worked faithfully with Thy graces and helps, at the end I may be able to think and say with Thy apostle Paul: "By the grace of God I am what I am; and His grace in me hath not been void."<sup>2</sup> Many and frequent graces hast Thou given me, O Lord! and I have not allowed them to lie idle; I have worked with them as well as I could for my eternal salvation: "Lord, Thou didst deliver to me five talents; behold, I have gained other five over and above," that I may deserve to hear from Thee the consoling words: "Well done, good and faithful servant: because thou hast been faithful over a few things I will place thee over many things, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."<sup>3</sup> Amen.

*Another introduction to the same sermon for the fifth Sunday in Lent.*

Text.

*Si quis sermonem meum servaverit, mortem non videbit in æternum.*—John viii. 51.

"If any man keep My word, he shall not see death forever."

<sup>1</sup> Quid est, quod dilectus meus in domo mea fecit scelera multa?—Jerem. xi. 15.

<sup>2</sup> Gratia Dei sum id quod sum, et gratia ejus in me vacua non fuit.—I. Cor. xv. 10.

<sup>3</sup> Domine, quinque talenta tradidisti mihi, ecce alia quinque superlucratus sum. Ego serve bone et fidelis, quia super pauca fulisti fidelis, super multa te constituam, intra in gaudium Domini tui.—Matt. xxv. 20, 21.

**Introduction.**

This again holds good for all men: "If any man keep My word," that is, My law and commandments, "he shall not see death forever," but shall possess the eternal kingdom of heaven. Not one man in the world is excepted here; all should keep the law, for this is the will and desire of God, who, as far as in Him lies, wishes the salvation of all men. All can keep the law, for graces and helps are given to all, since the divine generosity has prepared them in abundance, as I have already shown. Meanwhile there are many people, etc. *Continues as above.*

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**SIXTY-SEVENTH SERMON.**

**ON THE HOPE OF THE JUST TO ATTAIN ETERNAL HAPPINESS,  
ALTHOUGH THEY HAVE FORMERLY COMMITTED GRIEVOUS SINS.**

**Subject.**

No just man has cause to give way to a cowardly fear on the way to heaven on account of sins committed, many and grievous though they be, if he has repented of them from his heart; but rather all the more should he hope and rejoice in the Lord.—*Preached on the sixth Sunday after Easter.*

**Text.**

*Charitas operit multitudinem peccatorum.*—I. Pet. iv. 8. (From to-day's Epistle.)

"Charity covereth a multitude of sins."

**Introduction.**

Truly, consoling words to encourage each and every sinner! What a good and merciful God we have! For after we have offended Him and insulted Him most grossly, a hundred, and even a hundred thousand times, and thus deserved the fire of hell, He has nevertheless prepared for us an easy and certain means of freeing ourselves from the filth of sin, and regaining our right to heaven; for all He asks of us is to repent sincerely and make a firm resolution of not sinning again, and to disclose our transgressions in confession to a man like ourselves, that we may

be absolved from them. Nay, where there is no opportunity of making this confession and receiving absolution, the good God has given us another means of cleansing our souls from sin, namely, an act of perfect charity, which, according to theologians, blots out all sins, no matter how grievous they are. "For charity covereth a multitude of sins." O penitent sinners! what a consolation for you! Have you confessed your sins with due sorrow? Have you loved your God with your whole heart for His own sake? Are you determined to serve Him in future? Then rejoice in the Lord! You are again on the right way to heaven; you are again, as you were before, children and dear friends of God, and you have nothing to fear on the way of salvation on account of your past sins, but rather all the more reason to hope for salvation, and to rejoice in the Lord, as I shall now show to your comfort. Presumptuous sinners, who seem to think that all you need do is to confess your sins at Easter, or now and then during the year, and then sin away again as recklessly as before, I do not address you to-day! You do not belong to the number of true penitents! Half-hearted Christians! vain children of the world, who, after having committed and confessed many mortal sins, still continue to live according to the world and the lusts of the flesh, and neglect the divine law as of no consequence, I do not speak to you either; for you do not belong to the number of true penitents! My words are only for those anxious, timorous souls, who dread even the danger of sin; who love God with their whole hearts, and do His will in all circumstances, or who at all events are most desirous of loving Him; who regret that they cannot love God enough, and are discouraged and frightened when they remember their former sins, although they have often repented of them, and amended their lives, thus acting as if they had little hope of heaven, and did not dare to rejoice in the Lord. For these I repeat:

#### Plan of Discourse.

*You have no cause to give way to a cowardly fear on the way to heaven on account of sins committed, many and grievous though they be, if you have repented of them from your hearts; but rather all the more should you hope and rejoice in the Lord. Such is the whole subject. To the praise and glory of the divine mercy, which I have so often experienced; to the encouragement*

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*of all souls who now mean well towards God, that they may constantly serve that merciful Lord with joyful hearts.*

Grant us Thy grace to this end, O God of mercy! through Mary, the Mother of mercy, and the intercession of our holy guardian angels.

God does not  
act towards  
the sinner  
as the latter  
deserves.

If God always hated the sinner as the latter deserves; if He treated him with the same contempt that He endures from him; if He inflicted due punishment at once after the sin without giving any respite; if He repelled him inexorably when he returns and asks for pardon; if He required full satisfaction to be made from the sinner's own goods; if after having pardoned, He still kept up a grudge against the sinner on account of his former misdeeds: then we poor sinners should all have cause to fear and lose heart, nay, we should have good reason to despair of salvation. But the Lord whom I adore as my God and Saviour is not so strict. I believe and experience quite the contrary of Him, namely, that He loves the sinner; that He always goes after him with His inspirations; that He awaits his return with indomitable patience; that He receives him with joy; that He gives him the means of paying the debts he has contracted; that He forgets forever the insults He has received, once He has pardoned them. Such is the way in which the Holy Scripture describes the goodness and mercy of God.

But shows  
love to him,  
even while  
he is in sin.  
Shown by a  
figure from  
Scripture.

I grant that God hates sin, and with an infinite hatred; yet He does not forget to show His love towards the sinner, although He has every right to hate and take vengeance on him. Nay, He shows him, so to speak, a more tender love and goodness, precisely because he is a sinner, because he is one whom He has lost out of the number of His children. We have a figure of this, in the Second Book of Kings, in the meek David, who had to fly when driven from his throne by his rebellious son Absalom. The wickedness and ingratitude of Absalom could not have been greater; neither could the love and tenderness shown him by David. The latter was indeed forced, in order to save his life, to take up arms against his undutiful, wicked son; but how careful he was in commanding his generals and soldiers to spare his son's life, and not to do him any harm. "And the king commanded Joab, and Abisai, and Ethai, saying: Save me the boy Absalom. And all the people heard the king giving charge to all the princes concerning Absalom." Meanwhile, as the

history tells us, Absalom was routed, and during his flight was caught by his long hair in the branches of a tree, where he remained hanging until he was pierced with three lances. David had conquered the rebels; his disgraceful flight was changed into a triumph, and he was delivered from him who had sought his life; the whole kingdom was in a state of peace and tranquillity; all his soldiers and subjects were filled with joy and exultation. But David, who had more reason than any one to rejoice, could think of nothing but the death of his child; he filled the court with his weeping and lamentations, his sighs and moans; he covered his face that he might not behold the light of day; he had much rather have lost the battle, his kingdom, his life itself, than have lost his son, wicked though the latter was. "The king therefore being much moved, went up to the high chamber over the gate, and wept. And as he went, he spoke in this manner: My son Absalom, Absalom, my son; would God that I might die for thee, Absalom, my son, my son Absalom." <sup>1</sup> My dear brethren, what else does this rebellious son represent but the sinner, who dares to rise up against his heavenly Father by disobedience and perversity? Truly, there is no wickedness in the conduct of Absalom that is not to be found in the rebellion of him who dares to despise the commandments of his God. But if the sinner is as presumptuous as Absalom, God is not less good and forgiving than the meek David. For what can equal the care this Lord has of His creatures, since He wishes to be known by the name of Father and Provider? "O Lord, Father, and God of my life!" prays the wise Ecclesiasticus, "leave me not." <sup>2</sup> What care, I ask, does He not take to preserve the life of a sinner, although all creatures strive to destroy him who has dared to insult their Creator. It seems to me that I hear the Lord crying out to those who attempt our lives: Save Me My child; do not harm the poor man; leave him still alive, lest he should perish forever! Ah, have I not often had experience of this whenever I placed my feet on the threshold of death? How easily might I not have died in that occasion, in that sickness, in that accident, in that great

<sup>1</sup> Et præcepit rex Joab, et Abisai, et Ethai, dicens: servate mihi puerum Absalom et omnis populus audiebat præcipientem regem cunctis principibus pro Absalom. Contristatus itaque rex, ascendit coenaculum portæ, et flevit. Et sic loquebatur vadens: fili mi Absalom, Absalom fili mi; quis mihi tribuat, et ego moriar pro te? Absalom fili mi, fili mi Absalom.—II. Kings xviii. 5, 33.

<sup>2</sup> Domine, Pater et Deus vitæ meæ, ne derelinquas me.—Ecclesi. xxiii. 4.

danger? I was then in the wretched state of sin; I still had in my hands the arms I took up against my God. If I had died then, where should I be now? But Thou, O my God and Father! the God of my life, it was Thou who didst save me! Thou hadst more thought of my eternal welfare than I myself had; Thou wert then careful of my life; Thou hast commanded Thy creatures to help me, hast protected me from accident, and hast sent Thy angels to save me. Thou didst cry out: Save Me My child! he is indeed a sinner, but still he is My creature, the work of My hands, one of My adopted children, whom I love. Save his life, that he may not die in the state in which he now is and be lost forever! Think of this, O sinners! How often could you not have been surprised by death in your unhappy state? Yet the very same God whom you have insulted and offended has preserved your lives that you may have time to return to Him by sincere repentance. So does God show His love even to the sinner, unworthy though the latter is of it.

Nay, He makes it redound to His honor to be merciful to the sinner.

Nay, He looks on it as honorable and glorious to Himself to show this love and mercy. "Therefore the Lord waiteth," He says by the Prophet Isaias, "that He may have mercy on you, and therefore shall He be exalted sparing you."<sup>1</sup> This is the exaltation and glory of which St. Paul writes to the Romans: "For all have sinned, and do need the glory of God."<sup>2</sup> What glory? That which God finds in pardoning the guilty. But would not God be equally glorious if He gave the rebels what they deserved and destroyed them? Yes; for He would thus give the world an opportunity of admiring His justice; but then it would not know of the glory and greatness of His love and mercy, and it is these latter attributes that God wishes to be known and praised especially. But how can they be known if they are exercised only in favor of the good and pious? Is it a wonderful thing to love him who loves you, to spare him who has done nothing to offend you? No; "all have sinned, and do need the glory of God." Not the innocent, but sinners are in need of love and mercy; sinners, to whom God can and will show the greatness of His mercy.

So that one who is actually in sin, and desires

From this I conclude in the first place: to have sinned, to have sinned grievously, to have sinned often, is no reason for doubting the goodness of God, but should rather be a motive to

<sup>1</sup> Propterea expectat Dominus, ut misereatur vestri; et ideo exaltabitur parcons vobis.—Is. xxx. 18.

<sup>2</sup> Omnes enim peccaverunt, et egent gloria Dei.—Rom. iii. 23.



urge us all the more to a sure and certain hope, even if we are actually in sin, provided we have the earnest will to repent truly. Imagine, my dear brethren, that the sovereign has founded a grand hospital, where all the sick of the town are to be taken in and cared for without distinction; there on a handful of straw lies a poor man, blind and lame, and covered with sores and ulcers; should he despair of being admitted into the hospital on account of his miserable state? Would not the very extremity of his wretchedness give him the first claim? Would he not say to himself: surely that house that stands open for all sufferers will not be closed against the most miserable of all. It is the same thought (and it should be yours too, sinners) that saves me from losing heart and despairing on account of the number and enormity of my past sins. God has erected, as it were, a hospital in the sacrament of penance for all sick, miserable, and wretched sinners; shall I then lose hope and fear that I shall find no room there on account of the grievousness and malice of my sins? Eh! no matter how bad they are, instead of depriving me of all claim on the divine goodness, they seem rather to give me a greater right to appeal to and profit by it; precisely because my transgressions are so hideous and so great I cry out all the louder, all the more confidently to heaven: O my God! have mercy on me! pardon me, O Lord! receive me and free me from this misery! I am the most wretched, the worst of all sinners; and for that reason, O God! Thou canst better show in me the glory of Thy mercy, the greatness of Thy love, the almighty power of Thy goodness!

to repent,  
has no reason to doubt  
of his salvation, but to  
hope for it  
all the more.  
Shown by a  
simile.

And truly He will show these in me, and will receive me again into favor, if I only wish it. For why otherwise should He so eagerly call on the sinner to return to Him, so patiently and with such long-suffering await him, if He were not minded to admit him to mercy? Does He not go after him for years, touching and disturbing his conscience, reminding him of his evil plight, calling and crying out to him, beseeching and entreating him to return, as if He could not exist without him and his friendship? The Prophet Jeremias describes Him, as it were, coaxing the sinful soul to come back to Him: "Return, O rebellious! . . . Thou hast prostituted thyself to many lovers: nevertheless return to Me, saith the Lord, and I will receive thee."<sup>1</sup>

God calls  
the sinner  
and eagerly  
awaits his  
return.

<sup>1</sup> *Revertere avertatrix! Fornicata es cum amatoribus multis; tamen revertere ad me, dicit Dominus, et ego suscipiam te.*—Jerem. xl. 12, 1.

And that the sinner may have less reason to be ashamed, as one generally is when one has done what he dares not acknowledge, and therefore runs off hiding his face, He forestalls his confession: "Thou hast prostituted thyself;" be not ashamed; I know what you have done; you have sinned with many; nevertheless return; all that you have done does not interfere with My mercy, no matter how grievous and shameful your sins are. "Return to Me, and I will receive thee." You shall be as you were before, My beloved child. Oh, the indescribable love and goodness of God! exclaims St. Bonaventure: "The sinner who is unwilling to return He invites to come back to Him, and does not cease calling out to him."<sup>1</sup> Does not that mean, O God! loving the sinner, and being ready to forgive him? Otherwise why shouldst Thou take such trouble for him? Why shouldst Thou not allow him to rush to ruin in his wantonness? No; return, He says as long as the sinful man's life lasts; return to Me; come back to Me!

Even His threats are a proof that He wishes to pardon the sinner.

Truly the Lord is often compelled, when all gentle exhortations and loving invitations are disregarded, to call out to the sinner in sharper tones, to threaten with fire and sword, to launch forth reproof and imprecations against him, such as we often see in the Sacred Scriptures; but even this gives greater hope and sufficient proof that He does not wish to reject, but to pardon. If I see an angry man standing over his prostrate foe with arms in his hands, oh! I should say at once, there is no chance for that wretch; he is bound to lose his life! But meanwhile I can hear nothing but angry words; the victor brandishes his sword and threatens and reviles his adversary; ah, I think, that man is not minded to slay his enemy; otherwise he would not have waited so long, for he might have spared his threats, since he has his foe at his mercy. Such, too, are my thoughts about the almighty God. To complain of the sinner, to upbraid him with his shameful deeds, to threaten him with the fire of hell, to brandish the drawn sword over his head, although in all places and times He has him completely in His power: that is not punishing, or inflicting the fatal blow, or taking revenge, or rejecting and reprobating; it is rather restraining anger, deferring vengeance, curbing wrath, giving time for repentance, inviting, and, as it were, compelling to return. In a word, all this is a sign of mercy and compassion; to me it seems like the

<sup>1</sup> Nolentem redire, vocat ut redeat; et ut revertatur, revocare non cessat.

conduct of a loving father, who sometimes appears to be in a terrible passion with his son who has offended him, and whom he seeks everywhere, although he knows the delinquent to be hidden in a corner; still he pretends not to see him, and goes about the room crying out: where is the rascal? I will flog him till the blood comes! Meanwhile the son keeps as still as possible, and trembles with fear, thinking how he may afterwards appease his father's anger. So dost Thou act, O good God! Thou threatenest as if Thou wert minded to destroy the sinner at once and condemn him to hell, but in reality Thy only wish is to inspire him with a salutary fear, and by that fear to drive him to ask for pardon. So He acted with our forefather immediately after the first sin: "Where art thou?"<sup>1</sup> He cried out in angry tones throughout paradise. But, O great God! says St. Chrysostom; Thou askest where he is? Dost Thou not know that he is hidden amidst the trees? Truly He knew it well, and yet He does not cease crying out: "Where art thou?" Until at last Adam crept humbly forth from his hiding-place, and acknowledged his guilt; and at once instead of punishing him with eternal death, the Lord comforted him with the promise of a Redeemer.

From this I draw another conclusion: to have sinned, and sinned grievously and often, is not a reason to despair, but rather to hope all the more in the mercy of God for a sinner who returns and does penance; for will He who has such a tender love for the sinner, who calls him so earnestly, who awaits him so patiently, while he is still flying from God and in the act of rebellion and of sin—will God, I ask, reject, abandon, thrust from Him the sinner who returns and asks for mercy, and promises to amend? Your sins, O man! are many in number, grievous in malice; for years and years you have wallowed in filth; be it so. But are your sins more hateful to God, now that you detest them, and bewail them, and fear the divine anger, than they were formerly, when you loved them more than you loved your God, and while you were despising His goodness? At that time He was as well aware of the malice and number of your sins as He is now, and yet He bore with you patiently; will He be more difficult to be moved to mercy now that you detest your sins with your whole heart? Formerly you transgressed His commandments with full deliberation, and with all the freedom of your

Hence the sinner who truly repents has no cause to fear, but to hope all the more.

<sup>1</sup> *Ubi es?*—Gen. iii. 9.

wicked will; yet He continued to love you, to seek after you, to await you, to do good to you, even without your knowledge or gratitude; will He then cease to love you only when He beholds you humbly prostrate at His feet? Must His only thought now be to punish you, to reject you, to cast you off from Him? How can that be possible? That would indeed give us the idea of a stern, unjust God, who loves a man while he sins, and rejects him when he repents.

For God  
will receive  
him most  
joyfully.

Oh, no! you cannot as quickly resolve to do penance, even in desire, as God is ready and willing to receive you, nay, to meet you with His grace. "He seems," says St. Augustine, "in a greater hurry to grant pardon than the sinner to receive it." Read in Holy Writ how He acted towards the godless Manasses, the vicious Achab, the ungrateful David, and many others. What were their crimes? David was an adulterer, a murderer, a scandal to the whole kingdom; Achab was a persecutor of the prophets, an unjust man, an idolater; Manasses was a monster of vice of all kinds: of impurity, cruelty, sorcery, who caused his own children to be burnt as an offering to the devil. It was with a humble sigh that Manasses while in prison implored the divine mercy; Achab put on a hair-shirt; David acknowledged his ingratitude with a contrite word: "I have sinned against the Lord." And behold, that was enough for the merciful God to induce Him to receive the first, to defer the chastisement of the second, and to forgive the third all his sins. This was still in the Old Testament, during a period which St. Cyprian calls the time of divine justice and vengeance; what will He not do now in the law of grace, the New Law, the time of mercy, in which the flesh and blood of His own Son are daily offered to Him for our sins? Read how Jesus Christ has acted; He who says of Himself: "I am not come to call the just, but sinners." Publicans, notorious sinners, adulterers, unjust, usurers, and the like were those by whom He was always surrounded, as St. Luke testifies of Him: "Now the publicans and sinners drew near unto Him to hear Him," so that the scribes and Pharisees, who could find nothing else to say against Him, called Him by what they thought the disgraceful name of patron and protector of sinners: "And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying: This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with

<sup>1</sup> Tardius ei videtur peccatori veniam dare, quam ipsi peccatori accipere.

<sup>2</sup> Peccavi Domino.—II. Kings xii. 13.

<sup>3</sup> Non enim veni vocare justos, sed peccatores.—Matt. ix. 13.

them.”<sup>1</sup> Read how He acted towards the notorious Magdalene, the usurer Zachæus, the woman taken in adultery, the thief on the cross; read only the parable of the prodigal son (which is so touching that I can never think of it without tears, when I remember my former wicked life), see how he was received by his father. Consider all this, I say, and you will be obliged to acknowledge and confess with penitent David: “With the Lord there is mercy, and with Him plentiful redemption.”<sup>2</sup>

Then you will be compelled to acknowledge with me (and this is the main object of the whole sermon) that if God is so good to him who is actually in sin, if He is so loving to the sinner who is intending to repent, if He receives so joyfully the sinner who returns to Him, if He promises heaven and actually gives it to the sinner who repents even at the last moment: what will not that soul have to hope for from Him, what consolation must it not enjoy, when it has long ago bewailed its past misdeeds, and has been trying for some time past to serve God with all possible zeal? Will the divine heart be less loving to such a soul because it has proved its fidelity for a longer time? Will the gate of heaven be closed more tightly, the gates of hell be more to be dreaded than in the case of the sinner? But who can believe that? For then a penitent and now just man, who is of good will, would be worse off than the sinner, who is still careless of his salvation, and has only the intention of repenting. Then we should have good reason for doubting the truth of what the God of truth has said: “If the wicked do penance for all his sins which he hath committed, and keep all My commandments . . . living he shall live, and shall not die;” his former wicked life shall not harm him in the least: “The wickedness of the wicked shall not hurt him.”<sup>3</sup> And what Thou sayest, O Lord! is true; Thou wilt keep Thy word.

Why then, O penitent Christians! who now serve the Lord, why should you give way to fear, anxiety, faintheartedness? Do those timid souls, who are always melancholy, sad in thought, and never dare to have a firm hope of heaven, on account of the many sins they have committed in the past, do they perhaps

Finally, the penitent who has amended and served God faithfully hitherto has no cause to fear, but to hope all the more.

It is unjust to mistrust God on account of past sins. Shown by a parable.

<sup>1</sup> Erant autem appropinquantes ei publicani et peccatores ut audirent illum. Et murmurabant Pharisei et Scribæ dicentes: quia hic peccatores recipit et manducat cum illis. —Luke xv. 1, 2.

<sup>2</sup> Apud Dominum misericordia et copiosa apud eum redemptio. —Ps. cxxix. 7.

<sup>3</sup> Si autem impius egerit penitentiam ab omnibus peccatis suis, quæ operatus est, et custodierit omnia præcepta Tua . . . vita vivet et non morietur. Impietas impij non nocebit ei. —Ezech. xviii. 21, 22; xxxiii. 12.

think that they thus please God, or perform a meritorious work, or practise humility? If so, they are greatly mistaken. It is one thing to be humble and have a lowly opinion of one's self before God, and another to be excessively troubled regarding one's salvation, and to mistrust the goodness of God. When the prodigal son returned repentant to his father, and sighed forth: "Father, I have sinned against Heaven and before thee, I am not now worthy to be called thy son,"<sup>1</sup> his father, without the least word of reproof, fell on his neck, embraced him most heartily, led him into the house with joy and gladness, clothed him with new garments, prepared a great feast for him, invited his friends to rejoice with him and make merry on account of his son that was lost and had returned again. Now, if while the family was thus rejoicing, the son sat there sad and melancholy, and refused to be comforted; or if he afterwards imagined that he had cause to be afraid, and anxious lest his father might still be angry with him, and therefore he did not dare to address him with due childlike confidence: do you think, I ask, that such conduct would be pleasing to that loving father? On the contrary, he would have just cause for being greatly displeased at it. What is the matter with you, my son? he would say. Who has done anything against you? Have I given you cause for fear or anxiety? I am quite satisfied with you; I and all my friends rejoice at your return, and yet you look as sad and troubled as if you did not trust me. Have I deserved that from you? If I did not mean well towards you I should not have received you with such kindness, but rather have left you to your own devices. And you refuse to trust in me, and to show me a cheerful countenance? There, timid, cowardly soul, you see how you act towards the good God when you doubt of your salvation on account of your past sins. You were the prodigal son when you ran away from your heavenly Father, sought your freedom, and wallowed in all kinds of vice. You certainly have cause to grieve with a childlike sorrow, and to repent most sincerely of having offended such a good Father so grossly and so frequently; this too you have done when you came to the knowledge of your guilt and revealed it in confession, and returned to God; this you still often do when the recollection of your past sins causes you to renew your contrition, and to detest your sins; your heavenly Father has again received you; He has

<sup>1</sup> Pater, peccavi in cœlum et coram te, jam non sum dignus vocari filius tuus. — Luke xv. 21.

again clothed your soul with the robe of sanctifying grace; He has prepared for you a sumptuous feast, in which He gives you the precious body and blood of His own divine Son as the food of your soul in the holy Communion, that you have received so frequently; His whole heaven has rejoiced with Him because you have repented and come back to Him, as He Himself says: "There shall be joy before the angels of God upon one sinner doing penance."<sup>1</sup> The holy angels still rejoice that you are freed from the slavery of the devil and that you are now a co-heir with them to the kingdom of heaven; God has sworn to you on His fatherly fidelity that He will never again think of the sins that you have truly repented of and confessed; but in spite of all this, you are not satisfied with Him, and refuse to trust Him or to treat Him with confidence. You are still troubled and anxious lest He should upbraid you with your former transgressions, and exclude you from heaven on account of them. Is that acting honorably, or in a childlike manner? Eh! there is not the least doubt that you act unjustly to that loving, merciful God who means so well with you, by mistrusting Him when He has not given you the least occasion for so doing.

The holy Fathers tell us that we should not be troubled or give way to cowardly fear, even if we fall into sin and faults through weakness; and there are many who lose heart when they see how they fail to keep their good resolutions. Every morning, they say, I make the firm purpose of avoiding this or that fault, of acting with meekness towards my neighbor and even towards those who offend me, of not contradicting any one, of bearing with patience, for God's sake, the cross laid on me, etc. But what occurs? At the first opportunity my resolution is thrown to the winds and I fall into the old sins again. Nearly every time I go to confession I have the same faults to tell. What is to become of me; for I cannot see any sign of improvement? What! say the holy Fathers, do you think you are an angel, or that you are already in the place of eternal happiness, where one cannot sin? You are still on earth, a poor, weak mortal, and that you must humbly acknowledge yourself to be. Even the best and holiest servants of God did not dare to boast of being free from faults and failings. "If we say that we have no sin," says St. John, "we deceive ourselves."<sup>2</sup> "In many things we all offend,"<sup>3</sup>

Not even on account of daily faults should we be cowardly, much less on account of past sins.

<sup>1</sup> *Gaudium erit coram angelis Dei super uno peccatore poenitentiam agente.*—Luke xv. 10.

<sup>2</sup> *Si dixerimus quoniam peccatum non habemus, ipse nos seducimus.*—1. John i. 8.

<sup>3</sup> *In multis offendimus omnes.*—James iii. 2.

such is the confession of St. James; all of us, no matter who we are, commit many faults. These are sayings of the holy apostles, who, as St. Thomas well remarks, were filled with grace and confirmed therein; and you imagine that you can manage matters so well as not to be guilty of any sin whatever? It is sometimes a sign of spiritual pride when one is troubled at committing small faults now and then. The knowledge of our frailty should make us humble, but not pusillanimous and distrustful. We should rejoice and thank God that we have not fallen into grievous sin. Now if we should not lose heart and courage even when we actually fall into sin, how much less should we despair of salvation on account of sins sincerely repented of and washed away by the precious Blood of Jesus Christ?

We must always feel sorry for our sins, and be glad of that sorrow.

Ah, they say, must I not be sorry when I think of my past life, and remember how often I have offended the good God by mortal sin? Peter wept during his whole life whenever he heard the cock crow, and was thus reminded of his denial of his divine Master. Magdalene and other holy penitents used to shed tears of blood constantly. Aloysius, that innocent angel, could not think of the few and very slight faults he ever committed without being filled with sorrow and repentance. And shall I, who have so often and so grievously sinned, be of good heart and joyful? Listen to me; it is one thing to repent of one's sins, to weep at the recollection of them, and another to be down-hearted on account of past transgressions, to lose confidence in God, and to despair of salvation. Truly, you must be sorry, and may shed as many tears as you please when you think of your former sins, but your sorrow and contrition should be childlike, and not take away your inward confidence and repose of conscience; your sorrow should bring you a spiritual comfort and joy, as St. Augustine says: "Let the penitent always be sorry, and rejoice at his sorrow."<sup>1</sup> For no one has more reason to rejoice than he who feels that he is heartily sorry for his sins, since that is a true sign that he is forgiven and is now a child of God. It is true that Peter, Magdalene, and many other saints wept constantly; but do you think that their tears were sad and melancholy, that they proceeded from fear and doubts regarding their salvation? Their tears were sweeter and more agreeable than all the laughter of the world, says St. Chrysostom; they were tears that came from a tender love of God, and from interi-

<sup>1</sup> *Semper doleat poenitens, et de dolore gaudet.*—S. Aug. de vera et falsa poenit. c. 12.



or consolation of heart. Hear what St. Paul, who was at first a great sinner, says of them: "As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing;"<sup>1</sup> outwardly we seem to be afflicted, but at heart we are joyful. Be sorry then for your past sins; that no one can find fault with, for it is a most meritorious work; but at the same time be glad in the Lord, and hope all the more for your eternal salvation. Only keep on advancing, and with joy, on the right road, on which you now are, the way to heaven, and abandon yourself to the goodness and mercy of God.

Yes, my God, to Thee will I trust myself, although Thou knowest that I have been a great sinner, and perhaps greater than any one here! If Thy mercy were not so great, there would be nothing else for me but despair, nothing to expect but the damnation which I have deserved. But Thy goodness, when I consider it, turns all the gloomy clouds into brightness. I only regret, and regret a thousand times, that I have ever offended such a good, patient, merciful Father. The thought of my past sins shall serve to humble me all the more; the thought of Thy goodness shall make me serve Thee in future with more care and zeal, and love Thee above all things with my whole heart. For the rest I shall be of good heart, and the more experience I have of Thy mercy, the more I shall stand in need of it in future, the greater too shall be my hope and confidence in it. If I come to Thee in heaven (and I have no doubt of that if I only remain true to Thee; Thou too wilt lend me a helping hand to this end), then my eternal gratitude shall redound to Thy honor and glory; for I shall be an everlasting, living proof of Thy infinite mercy towards sinners, a mercy that I shall love and praise forever. Amen.

Resolution to serve the good God with joy and zeal, and to praise His mercy.

*Another introduction to the same sermon for the first Sunday after Easter.*

#### Text.

*Quorum remisieritis peccata, remittuntur eis.*—John xx. 23.

"Whose sins you shall forgive they are forgiven them."

#### Introduction.

Truly comforting and encouraging words for each and every sinner! What a good and merciful God we have! After having offended and insulted Him most grossly a thousand, nay, a hundred thousand times, and thus deserved the fire of hell, He has

<sup>1</sup> Quasi tristes, semper autem gaudentes.—II. Cor. vi. 10.

nevertheless prepared for us such an easy and sure means of cleansing ourselves from the filth of sin, and regaining our right to heaven; for all we have to do is to repent of our sins sincerely, with the firm resolution of not committing them again, and then confess them in the secrecy of the confessional to one appointed for the purpose, and receive absolution. If this is done, and done properly, O sinners! no matter how wicked you have been, rejoice in the Lord, you are again in the way of grace that leads to heaven! The promise of Our Lord cannot fail: "Whose sins you shall forgive they are forgiven." Such are His words to His apostles and to all approved priests. Therefore you have nothing to fear on the way to heaven, as I shall now show to your comfort. Presumptuous sinners, etc. *Continues as above.*

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### SIXTY-EIGHTH SERMON.

#### ON THE HOPE THE JUST HAVE OF HEAVEN, ALTHOUGH A STRICT JUDGMENT AWAITS THEM.

##### Subject.

He who is to judge us is a strict and terrible Judge, but a consoling Judge for those who are of good will, because He is Jesus Christ.—*Preached on Christmas day.*

##### Text.

*In terra pax hominibus bonæ voluntatis.*—Luke ii. 14.  
 "On earth peace to men of good will."

##### Introduction.

This is the peace of which St. Paul writes to the Philippians: "And the peace of God, which surpasseth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus;"<sup>1</sup> and to the Romans: "Peace and joy in the Holy Ghost."<sup>2</sup> This peace was announced last night by the angels, when Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the world, was born in the stable at Bethlehem: "On earth peace to men." To what kind of men? Not to all kinds; but to "men of good will;" that is, to those who, having renounced

<sup>1</sup> Et pax Dei, quæ exsuperat omnem sensum, custodiat corda vestra, et intelligentias vestras in Christo Jesu.—Philipp. iv. 7.

<sup>2</sup> Pax et gaudium in Spiritu Sancto.—Rom. xiv. 17.

sin, are of good will to be always faithful to God, and to do His will in all things faithfully; these must and can rejoice in the Lord in peace and gladness of heart. Just and pious Christians who have that will, this peace is for you! Be glad, then, in the Lord, and enjoy the peace which your newly-born Saviour caused to be announced to you. Ah, some timid souls will say, it is easy to talk of peace! Is not this the day on which was born the same Incarnate God whom you described to us last Advent in such terrible colors, reminding us that He will come at the last day to judge the living and the dead? that no matter how we consider Him, He is a strict and terrible Judge—terrible as God, terrible as man? Have we not then reason rather to fear and tremble than to rejoice in peace and repose of heart? True it is, my dear brethren, I do not retract what I have said; my words on that occasion were intended to inspire a salutary fear. I say it again: Jesus Christ, who was born on this day, will be in every way a strict and terrible Judge; but to whom? To the wicked, of whom I have spoken exclusively up to this; to those who do not repent while they have time, nor amend their lives, and thus appear before their Judge in the state of sin. But I have nothing to say to them to-day, for they have not the slightest share in this peace. Pious Christians, who have the good will to serve your God faithfully and constantly, peace be with you! You have nothing to fear from the Judge who was born to-day, but may await Him with consolation and joy of heart, as I shall now prove for your encouragement; and I say:

#### Plan of Discourse.

*He who is to Judge us is a strict and terrible Judge; but to men of good will He is a consoling Judge; and that because He is the Saviour Jesus Christ who became Man. Such is the whole subject.*

Christ Jesus, our future Judge, grant to all who mean well with Thee Thy peace, that they may continue to serve Thee with gladness of heart! This we ask of Thee through Thy virginal Mother, Mary, and the holy angels, who sang to-day: "On earth peace to men of good will."

He who will judge us is a strict and terrible Judge; this is the beginning of the sermon that I intend for your encourage-

Our future Judge is a

terrible and  
strict  
Judge.

ment, and to inspire you with hope, peace, and joy of heart. A strict and terrible Judge; this, O timid souls! is the proposition that you advance as the foundation of your just fears. How am I to attain my object? or what answer shall I make to your objection? I cannot deny that there is reason for fear when we consider the coming of the Judge; for if I open the Holy Scriptures I shall find hundreds of passages that force me to cry out in terror in the words of the psalm: "Thou art terrible, and who shall resist Thee?"<sup>1</sup> There I find described a God of such holiness that the least fault arouses His indignation; a God who sees everything so clearly that even in the angels He can see faults; a God who takes such severe vengeance that He punishes in the children the crimes of their parents, and in parents the sins of their children, in superiors the sins of their subjects, in subjects the sins of superiors; who wields the rod of justice over the heads of descendants to the third and fourth generation on account of the sins of their ancestors; and over a whole city and country on account of the sin of one man; a God who judges so strictly that on the day of reckoning He will demand an account, not only of all our actions and works, but even of our words, our desires, our wishes, our most secret thoughts; none even of the things to which we sometimes pay no attention shall be omitted in His account-book; all shall be examined, judged, punished, even to the least idle word, the least idle, useless thought. To be there questioned, condemned, punished, rejected, it is not necessary to have committed a sinful act; His justice will know how to inflict chastisement for what we have omitted, for what we have been ignorant of through our own fault, for what we have not saved others from, for what we have connived at by our silence, for what we have given occasion to.

And terrible, too, in every way; so that the wicked have cause to fear Him.

And it is not only the sinner who has that strict judgment to expect; even he who now seems to be just, if he is not as just as he should be, if he is not zealous in the divine service, if he is careless in the duties of his state, if he is tepid and sleepy in his devotions, if he neglects to work according to the measure of the graces and talents given to him, if he does not perform holy works and pious practices in a holy manner, and if they are not found perfect in the sight of God, as the Scripture says: "I find not thy works full,"<sup>2</sup> even for these things the just man

<sup>1</sup> Tu terribilis es, et quis resistet tibi?—Ps. lxxv. 8.

<sup>2</sup> Non invenio opera tua plena.—Apoc. iii. 2.

will have to answer in judgment. And when shall we be called to this account by the avenging Judge? We know not; the day, the hour, the moment is and shall remain concealed from us. It will be at a time when we least expect; it will come on stealthily like a thief in the night, as the Apostle says.<sup>1</sup> Thus many a sinner is overtaken in the midst of his worldly occupations, in his pleasures or vices, without having time to repent. And what terrifies me still more in the inscrutable designs of Divine Providence is, that the Almighty sometimes does not wait for death, but begins, as it were, during life to judge; for He often withdraws His hand from those who refuse to hearken to His voice, gives them over to their own desires, allows them to become hardened in vice, so that their understanding is blinded, their will rendered obstinate, nor does He make Himself known to them until the moment has come for them to quit this world impenitent. All that I have said hitherto, my dear brethren, are nearly the exact words of Scripture. Oh, truly, God is strict in His justice! Oh, fear, fear, fear always; but only you, O wicked Christians, who wantonly continue in a career of vice.

“On earth peace to men of good will.” Pious Christians, who fear the Lord and love Him, be of good heart, be comforted and hopeful! And you too, sinners, no matter how wicked you have been, who have been converted to the Lord, and are now sincerely resolved to serve Him constantly, do not be down-hearted; rejoice rather with a childlike hope of salvation! If our Judge is strict and just, He is also a long-suffering, meek, merciful Lord, who calls Himself indeed a powerful, but at the same time a patient and kindly Judge: “God is a just Judge, strong and patient.”<sup>2</sup> If He sometimes seems to be indignant in the law of grace, it is, as I have remarked, under the figure of a householder who is displeased at the unfaithfulness of his steward, and who says to him in an angry voice: “Give an account of thy stewardship.”<sup>3</sup> Who would not think that the poor steward who had erred so grievously would have had a severe punishment to suffer? Yet no harm was done him; he went away and even released the other debtors of his lord from their just debts; and behold his master forgot all about his anger, and even praised the cleverness of the steward, unjust as he had been: “And the lord commended the unjust steward for as much as he had

Yet to those  
who repent  
He is a  
consoling  
Judge.  
Shown by  
similes from  
Scripture.

<sup>1</sup> *Sicut fur in nocte ita veniet.*—I. Thess. v. 2.

<sup>2</sup> *Deus iudex justus, fortis et pater.*—Ps. vii. 12.

<sup>3</sup> *Redde rationem villicationis tue.*—Luke xvi. 2.

done wisely.”<sup>1</sup> This, my dear brethren, is a symbol of the alms that the sinner distributes to the poor, in order to appease the divine anger and obtain powerful graces of conversion. Again He represents Himself as a mighty king whose servant owes him many millions; as St. Matthew writes, the servant was quickly summoned and commanded to pay the whole debt. The unhappy man humbled himself, threw himself on his knees, and begged for a little time with the promise of paying all he owed; and the merciful king not only granted him the time, but even remitted the debt altogether: “And the lord of that servant being moved with pity, let him go and forgave him the debt.”<sup>2</sup> A symbol of the sinner who, after having committed millions of sins, receives mercy and pardon from God for a single act of heartfelt contrition. Again He represents Himself under the figure of the householder, who, as we read in the Gospel of St. Matthew, sends laborers into his vineyard. He found some men standing idle in the streets, doing nothing the whole day: “Why stand you here all the day idle?”<sup>3</sup> he said to them with displeasure. What did they do? They went at his command into the vineyard, and as it was near evening, worked there for an hour. They could not have earned much during that time, yet they received as much wages as those who had toiled the whole day. A symbol of the man who, having spent the greater part of his life in sloth and tepidity in the divine service, resolves to be more zealous and diligent in doing the will of God for the remainder of his days. Truly, Our Lord and God is a Judge, but, He is a kindly Judge, even when He seems to be angry; a humble petition, the mere good will, when the work itself is not possible, is enough to make anything right with Him.

Much less  
cause for  
fear have  
the just who  
are of good  
will.

Instead of the title of Judge, which is apt to inspire dread, He takes ten others, namely, those of Protector, Helper, Guardian, Benefactor, Comforter, Saviour, Friend, Father, Bridegroom, loving Mother: all of which cause comfort and consolation. Where I read once in the Scripture of His anger and indignation, I read twenty times of His mildness and kindness; for one text that speaks of His justice, I find a hundred that tell us of His mercy, and indeed exalt it above all the other divine perfections, although they are infinite. “The Lord is sweet to

<sup>1</sup> Et laudavit dominus villicum iniquitatis, quia prudenter fecisset.—Luke xvi. 8.

<sup>2</sup> Misertus autem dominus servi illius, dimisit eum et debitum dimisit ei.—Matt. xviii. 27.

<sup>3</sup> Quid hic statis tota die otiosi?—Ibid. xx. 8.

all, and His tender mercies are over all His works,"<sup>1</sup> such are the words of the Prophet David. One reason, my dear brethren, for fear, twenty for rejoicing; a hundred for hope, none for losing heart or despairing! Now if this holds good for the most wicked sinner, as long as he is not actually in hell, and provided he has a firm purpose of amendment, what reason for fear can there then be for that soul that has already often repented of and atoned for its past misdeeds? for the soul that serves God with all possible zeal, and tries to serve Him? "Serve ye the Lord with gladness," says David to such souls; "come in before His presence with exceeding great joy. For the Lord is sweet, His mercy endureth forever."<sup>2</sup> "Serving the Lord, rejoicing in hope,"<sup>3</sup> says St. Paul. Otherwise you wrong the divine goodness, and have not a true appreciation of God's mercy.

Besides all this, consider the Person of the Judge. Who is He? The very same whom, as we have seen in the beginning, you have hitherto feared as strict and terrible; He who will judge us is Jesus Christ, the Saviour, who was born for the redemption of the world. Oh, what a sweet and consoling name that is, especially for the just who are of good will! Beautiful are the ideas expressed by St. John Chrysostom on this subject in his explanation of the words of the psalm, "Give to the king Thy judgment, O God! and to the king's son Thy justice."<sup>4</sup> Why, says that holy Father, does David, as it were, ask God to renounce His right of judging men, and give it over to His Son? Why, he asks further, has God really heard that prayer, as Our Lord Himself tells us in the Gospel of St. John: "For neither doth the Father judge any man, but hath given all judgment to the Son."<sup>5</sup> Why is that? Would the ends of justice be less served if judgment were left to the Father? Yet who could think that? Truly justice would be well served, but in a more terrible manner for us; because if a God of infinite holiness without human nature were to judge sinful men; if an impassible God were to judge men subject to so many unlawful passions and desires; if an almighty and offended God were to judge

Especially  
as Christ is  
to be their  
Judge.

<sup>1</sup> *Suavis Dominus universis, et miserationes ejus super omnia opera ejus.*—Ps. cxliv. 9.

<sup>2</sup> *Servite Domino in letitia, introite in conspectu ejus in exultatione. Quoniam suavis est Dominus, in eternum misericordia ejus.*—Ibid. xcix. 2, 5.

<sup>3</sup> *Domino servientes; spe gaudentes.*—Rom. xii. 11, 12.

<sup>4</sup> *Deus, judicium tuum regi da, et justitiam tuam filio regis.*—Ps. lxxi. 1.

<sup>5</sup> *Neque enim Pater judicat quenquam; sed omne judicium dedit Filio.*—John v. 22.

weak men who have grossly insulted Him; then we should have nothing to expect but a sentence pronounced with all severity, and punishment without mercy. But as we are to be judged by a Man like ourselves, who knows our weakness and misery by His own experience, who has taken our sins on Himself and borne the weight of them, who is of the same nature as ourselves, our Brother: oh, instead of having little to hope for and much to fear, it is clear that we have rather a thousand times more ground for hope than for fear (I speak of men of good will). Therefore, concludes St. Chrysostom, David prayed earnestly: "Give to the king Thy judgment, O God, and to the king's son Thy justice." Therefore has God for our consolation entrusted the office of Judge to His Son, to the human nature of Jesus Christ.

They could not desire a more favorable Judge, because He has a most tender love for them.

And, my dear brethren, since we have to stand before a Judge, could we find in the whole world one in whom we could place more trust and confidence than in this same Son of God? For my part, if God left to myself the choice of the judge who is to pronounce final sentence on me for eternity, I should select no other in heaven or on earth than Jesus Christ; and I would beg and entreat of Him to accept this office and judge me. For in whom could I find better qualities for the purpose than in my Saviour? In the first place I should like a judge who is of incomparable goodness; and in the second place, one who knows everything that would tend to excuse me; who knows it by his own experience, and therefore is inclined to have compassion on me. I should moreover like one who loves me truly, so that he is my friend, my best friend, my special friend, whose great object is to pronounce a favorable sentence and make me eternally happy. There is the sort of judge I should wish for. And are you not of that opinion too? But our wish is already fulfilled; we have a Judge of the kind already; He is Jesus Christ, the incarnate God. As far as love and goodness are concerned, can any love or goodness be compared with His? What has He not done to prove His love and to win our hearts? He has made Himself a little Babe wrapped in swaddling-clothes that we might approach Him without fear, and deal with Him on most friendly terms as one does with children. He has become Man that He might share with us in the miseries of our nature; He became poor that He might enrich us; He became the most abject and despicable of men that He might exalt us; He made



Himself a servant and a slave that He might free us from slavery. He acts the part of a Father that He may treat us as His children; of a Master, to instruct us; of a Spouse, to encourage us to love Him tenderly; of an Advocate with His heavenly Father, to appease Him and make Him favorable to us; of Intercessor, to restore our ruined fortunes. Of His own accord He gave up His life on the cross that He might free us from eternal death; He has left us His flesh as our food, His blood as our drink as a perpetual sacrifice in the Blessed Sacrament. He Himself challenges all men and says to them: "What is there that I ought to do more to My vineyard that I have not done to it?"

The other quality consists in this, that He knows our weakness and frailty, and has compassion on us. He compassionates us as God, for He has made us out of the dust of the earth: "He knoweth our frame," says the prophet; "He remembereth that we are dust," and therefore "as a father hath compassion on his children, so hath the Lord compassion on them that fear Him." Still greater is the compassion He has for us as Man; for in His mortal body He bore our miseries even to temptation from the foul fiend, even to the sweat of the death-agony, even to being abandoned by His heavenly Father, as He complained on the cross. Sin alone excepted, as the Apostle says, there is no weakness that He has not shared with us, that He may have a tender heart towards us after having experienced our frailty, and that when we fall through weakness He may be better able to deal mercifully with us and overlook our transgression. "We have not a high-priest who cannot have compassion on our infirmities," says St. Paul, "but one tempted in all things such as we are, without sin." Infinitely happy God as He was, yet He was so overwhelmed by fear, anguish, distrust, sadness, that the sweat ran down from Him in great drops of blood to the ground, and He was forced to utter the bitter cry of agony: "My soul is sorrowful even unto death;" and almost overcome by the thought of the suffering in store for Him, He begged His Father to take away that bitter chalice from Him, and said

He has pity  
on their  
frailties.

<sup>1</sup> Quid est quod debui ultra facere vinee mee, et non feci ei?—*Is.* v. 4.

<sup>2</sup> Quoniam ipse cognovit sumentum nostrum; recordatus est quoniam pulvis sumus. Quomodo miseretur pater filiorum, misertus est Dominus timentibus se.—*Pa.* cii. 14, 18.

<sup>3</sup> Non enim habemus pontificem qui non posset compati infirmitatibus nostris; tentatum autem per omnia pro similitudine absque peccato.—*Heb.* iv. 15.

<sup>4</sup> Tristis est anima mea usque ad mortem.—*Matt.* xxvi. 38.

afterwards on the cross: "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?"<sup>1</sup> O Lord! if I had no other proof of Thy clemency than this, if the faith did not teach me that Thou hast often sighed and wept when Thou sawest the miserable state of men, I should be sure enough that Thou wilt have compassion on our weakness from the sole fact that Thou hast felt and borne its heavy burden Thyself.

**And is their  
best Friend.**

He who will judge us (this is another reason for hoping for a favorable sentence) is our Friend, the best Friend we could wish to have, on whose affection and love for us we can safely rely. "You are my friends," He says Himself, "if you do the things that I command you."<sup>2</sup> Tell me: you have a friend who loves you truly; he has assured you of it a thousand times, on every occasion he has offered you his services, and has more than once given practical proofs of his affection. Truly rare is such great fidelity in the world! But great as it is, it is nothing compared to the friendship of your Saviour. The best thing your earthly friend can give you is his heart, but what a small, narrow heart it is; the heart of a mortal man! The Heart of Jesus Christ, which He has given you, is the heart of an infinitely great God. Your earthly friend is unable to help you in many cases; oh, how often does it not happen that all he can do for you is to bewail your misfortunes! The friendship of Christ is infinitely powerful; all nature, heaven and earth, death, all the demons in hell must obey His least sign. The love of the earthly friend is a new thing of recent date; a few years ago he first made your acquaintance; the love of the Son of God for you had no beginning; before all time, from eternity, in which His Godhead exists, He cast upon you the thoughts of His goodness and mercy, and had already resolved to become Man for you and die for you on the cross. The love of your earthly friend is perhaps somewhat selfish; his own wants, the hope of being assisted by you, or at least the pleasure he finds in your company draws his heart to you; the love that Jesus Christ has for you seeks no advantage but your own; He is rich, infinitely happy; He is God without you; He loves you and desires to love you forever for your own good, and to make you happy with His elect. Earthly friendship is often inconstant and changeable; the least fault, a rough word, a short answer, a sour face, even still less than

<sup>1</sup> Deus meus, Deus meus, utquid dereliquisti me?—Matt. xxvii. 46.

<sup>2</sup> Vos amici mei estis, si feceritis quæ ego præcipio vobis.—John xv. 14.

that: a slight act of negligence or forgetfulness, or coldness of manner, a mere imagination sometimes bursts asunder the strongest bonds of love and friendship. The love of Jesus Christ for us mortals is unchangeable; hundreds and thousands of sins have not been able to extinguish it; even when you drove Him out of your heart, nay, now while you still perhaps refuse to hearken to His voice, He still continues to knock at your door, and to beg of you in the most endearing manner to give Him your love and friendship; He says to you: "My son, give Me thy heart, and let thy eyes keep My ways;"<sup>1</sup> come back and I will receive you again into favor. Now you can see for yourself from all this what great confidence you should place in Christ your Saviour. If the decision of an important case rested with one of your best friends, would you not rejoice in the assurance of a favorable sentence, provided you yourself put no hindrance in the way? Why then do you trust less in Jesus Christ, who is indeed your Judge, but at the same time your Advocate, Intercessor, Saviour, well-meaning Friend, and Brother?

And I add one fact more; for it is His interest that you pass through the judgment successfully and gain eternal happiness; His external honor and glory are concerned therein, because He finds that even in overcoming an obstinate, rebellious heart, and in overlooking past sins and faults. The greater the sinner's guilt, the more is His goodness exalted by granting pardon, and letting heaven and earth see that the Almighty is greater in His mercy than in His justice. How much more then is He not concerned in not allowing the just, who have the good will to serve Him constantly, to be lost forever? His power and, so to say, His fidelity are interested in this; for He has espoused their cause, and come down from heaven to earth to save them from eternal ruin, and to bring them to Himself in heaven. His riches are concerned therein; for why should He without cause wish to lose all that He has expended for us and for our salvation? It has cost Him much blood to purchase us; will He allow that precious treasure to prove useless to us unless He is compelled and forced to do so by our not wishing to profit by it? Nay, His joy and happiness are concerned therein; I dare not say this so boldly if He Himself had not told me of it in the parable of the good shepherd, to whom He compares Himself, who wanders over hill and dale to find the lost sheep, and after

And it is  
His interest  
to make  
them  
happy.

<sup>1</sup> *Probe illi mi cor tuum mihi; et oculi tui vias meas custodiant.*—Prov. xxiii. 26.

having toiled and sweated and found it at last, brings it home on his shoulders, carries it to the fold, and then summons all his friends and neighbors to rejoice with him, and receives their congratulations as if some unexpected stroke of good fortune had happened to him: "And coming home," says the Gospel, "call together his friends and neighbors, saying to them: Rejoice with me, because I have found my sheep that was lost."<sup>1</sup> Mark how he does not say: rejoice with me because my sheep is returned, and has escaped the fangs of the fierce wolf; but rejoice with me; I am full of happiness, so that I think nothing of all the trouble I have had; I have found my sheep again. Would not one imagine that all his wealth and happiness were in that sheep, without which his consolation and joy would be incomplete? This, O my Saviour! is the way in which Thou seekest us; so much art Thou interested in our salvation that Thou makest a feast with Thy angels in heaven: "I say to you, that even so there shall be joy in heaven upon one sinner that doth penance."<sup>2</sup> What happiness will it not then be for Thee, and what general joy will it not give Thy angels and elect in Thy eternal kingdom, to see a penitent who has long served Thee faithfully coming to Thee in the eternal fold of heaven! Wo to him who finds in such goodness no reason for a childlike hope! Wo to him who, no matter how wicked he has been, mistrusts such a favorable Judge, and despairs through fear and anxiety!

Hence men  
of good will  
have cause  
to trust in  
this Judge,  
and accord-  
ing to His  
desire to  
rejoice in  
the Lord.

Come then, my dear brethren. "Ye that fear the Lord, hope in Him," says the wise Ecclesiasticus, "and mercy shall come to you for your delight." He has not laid aside His former mildness towards us; He is and will be just in His judgments; but because He is just, He must also keep His word that He will meet the returning sinner, receive Him into favor, and not allow any one to be lost who trusts in Him and tries to serve Him. "For God is compassionate and merciful, and will forgive sins in the day of tribulation; and He is a protector to all that seek Him in truth."<sup>3</sup> If we have in our Judge a good friend, what think you may we not expect from Him as our Brother and Father? If justice itself gives us reason for hope before the tribunal of

<sup>1</sup> Veniens domum convocat amicos et vicinos, dicens illis: congratulamini mihi, quia invení ovem meam quæ perierat.—Luke xv. 6.

<sup>2</sup> Dico vobis quod ita gaudium erit in cælo super uno peccatore poenitentiam agente.—Ibid. 7.

<sup>3</sup> Qui timetis Dominum, sperate in illum: et in oblationem veniet vobis misericordia. Quoniam pius et misericors est Deus, et remittet in die tribulationis peccata: et protector est omnibus exquirentibus se in veritate.—Ecclesi. ii. 9, 13.

God, what may we not hope when so many other comforting perfections, such as goodness, patience, generosity, mercy, appear on our side? Let those fear who do not know God, or love Him, or wish to amend their lives; but you, penitent sinners, you above all, pious souls, who try to avoid sin as well as you can, "serve ye the Lord with gladness;" it is this joyful hope that is most pleasing to God in our service and love. "God loveth a cheerful giver."<sup>1</sup> It is this joyful hope that Christ has inculcated on us when He teaches us by His apostle that we are not to serve Him as slaves, but as loving children: "For you have not received the spirit of bondage again in fear, but you have received the spirit of adoption of sons,"<sup>2</sup> so that you may honor your Father with confidence, serve Him without disgust or disquiet, and await with joy and spiritual gladness the salvation His fatherly love has prepared for you.

Oh, what a good God Thou art, dear Lord! for even in this vale of tears Thou commandest me to rejoice, when, great sinner as I am, Thou tellest me to hope! I have hitherto done an injustice to Thy goodness when I looked on Thee as a stern, severe Judge, and therefore so often through fear and anguish despaired of my eternal salvation! In future I will place all my hope in Thee; and even when I consider Thy just judgments, which have hitherto inspired me with fear and dread, I will console myself and rejoice with Thy holy servant David: "I remembered, O Lord! Thy judgments of old, and I was comforted."<sup>3</sup> Far be it from me to take occasion from this to offend Thee again all the more daringly; for that would not be hope, but presumption and gross ingratitude. But rather, since Thou art such a good God, on whose love and mercy I can joyfully rely, through whom I can be sure of my eternal salvation, I will for the future love Thee more fervently, and serve Thee with greater zeal and constancy. Amen.

Conclusion  
and purpose  
to serve  
such a kindly  
Judge  
with zeal  
and cheer-  
fulness.

<sup>1</sup> *Hilarem datorem diligit Deus.*—II. Cor. ix. 7.

<sup>2</sup> *Non enim accepistis spiritum servitutis iterum in timore, sed accepistis spiritum adoptionis filiorum.*—Rom. viii. 15.

<sup>3</sup> *Memor fui judiciorum tuorum a sæculo Domine; et consolatus sum.*—Ps. cxviii. 52.

**SIXTY-NINTH SERMON.**

**ON THE HOPE THE PIOUS HAVE OF SALVATION, ALTHOUGH  
THE NUMBER OF THE ELECT IS SMALL.**

**Subject.**

Although few are chosen, the pious have: 1. No cause for fear, no reason to have less hope of salvation; 2. But rather less cause for fear, and more for hope.—*Preached on the feast of the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary.*

**Text.**

*Ne timeas Maria, invenisti enim gratiam apud Deum.*—Luke i. 30.

“Fear not, Mary, for thou hast found grace with God.”

**Introduction.**

Why dost thou fear, O Mary? I bring thee news that must cause heaven and earth to rejoice. Thou hast found grace with God, and that too such grace as no mere creature dare hope for on earth, a grace that fills me and all the heavenly spirits with admiration when we think of it, so that we wait on thee most humbly as our sovereign Queen. Thou art the only one whom the Lord has chosen among all His creatures to be raised to such a dignity, that His alone accepted, there can be none greater. Thou art the only one among mothers who art at the same time virgin. Thou art the only one among virgins who art at the same time a mother; and the Mother of the Most High God thou shalt be! Fear not! Rejoice! Such is the meaning of the words of the angel to Mary. This is the day, O most Blessed Virgin! on which the joyful message was announced to thee; what else can we do but congratulate thee and rejoice with thee on the great grace conferred on thee? Yes, O most Blessed Mother! to show thee our joy, we send thee with our whole hearts the glad greeting: “Hail, Mary, full of grace!” But we must add: “pray for us sinners” who do not know and dare not examine how things are on high regarding our election. Pray for us sinners, who do not know whether we

are in favor or disgrace with God; who know not whether we are worthy of love or hatred; who know not whether we are chosen for heaven or doomed to hell; and who moreover hear resounding in our ears the terrible words: "Many are called but few chosen."<sup>1</sup> Alas! the joy we experience on thy account is mixed with no small degree of fear as far as we are concerned. Permit me, dearest Mother, to refrain now from extolling thee, though thou art not sufficiently to be praised, while I examine in detail this latter thought. It will also help to thy praise, and to the preservation of our joy. My dear brethren, this is the most violent temptation that is wont to assail us frequently: "few are chosen" for heaven. This thought often makes the pious soul downcast and despondent, and drives the sinner to despair. Yet I dare to address you to-day in the words of the angel to Mary: fear not, pious Christian; fear not, penitent sinner, thou hast found grace with God! If you are only in earnest about amending your lives and living piously, you are of those who are called to eternal grace, and the smallness of the number of the elect should not cause you to doubt, but rather to rejoice, as I shall now show to the consolation and encouragement of all good Christians, and to the conversion and amendment of the wicked.

#### Plan of Discourse.

*Although few are chosen, yet you have no reason to fear, or to have less hope of salvation; the first part. Although few are chosen, you have reason to fear less and to hope more; the second part.*

Great God, who has chosen Mary alone among all mortals to be Thy Mother, and to whom alone is known the number of the elect, encourage us by Thy Mother, who is also the Mother of all men, and by the prayers of the angels of peace, to avoid sin, love Thee with all our hearts, and rejoice with childlike confidence in the hope of heaven!

The task that I have undertaken seems to be a difficult and an incongruous one, my dear brethren. My object is to inspire you with consolation and courage, and as the foundation of my argument I take the terrible truth: few are chosen! I say to you: fear not, rejoice in the hope of heaven; and at the same

Few are  
chosen: a  
terrible  
truth.

<sup>1</sup> Multi enim sunt vocati, pauci vero electi.—Matt. xx. 16.

time I agree with you that only few gain heaven! If I were minded to make a cold sweat burst out all over you through anguish, could I find a better means of so doing than to speak to you of that truth? No; for there is nothing to be compared to it for terror. Whatever other terrible things there are, they all take their terror from that. The multiplicity of past sins causes anguish, but it is because they can exclude us from the number of the elect. Death is a terrible thing, but only because I do not know whether it will be for me the entry into a happy or an unhappy eternity. The judgment-seat of God is terrible, but only because I do not know what sentence shall be pronounced on me there; whether I shall be called with the few to the kingdom of God, or condemned with the many to the place of torments. Hell, everlasting fire is a terrible thing; so terrible, that if only one of every thousand men, nay, if only one man in the whole world were to be sent there, all would have reason to tremble and to say like the disciples of Christ when He announced to them: "Amen, I say to you, that one of you is about to betray Me"—all the others would have good reason to ask with fear and trembling: "Is it I, Lord?"<sup>1</sup> Am I the unhappy man who is to be sent to the fire of hell among the demons? Heaven, eternal joy is such a great happiness, that if but one among a thousand, nay, if only one in the whole world were to be excluded from it, all would have good cause to tremble and ask: Is it I, Lord? Am I the unhappy wretch who must be deprived of heaven for all eternity?

Yet it is  
certain that  
very few  
are chosen.

Now the God of infallible truth assures us that the greater number of men shall be condemned to the flames of hell, while the smaller number shall be invited to heaven on the day of judgment. "Wide is the gate and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there are who go in thereat." On the other hand, "how narrow is the gate, and strait is the way that leadeth to life, and few there are that find it."<sup>2</sup> "Two shall be in the field: one shall be taken, and one shall be left."<sup>3</sup> Of the two brothers, Abel was taken, Cain left. Of the twins, Jacob was taken, Esau left; of two kings in one kingdom, David was taken, Saul left;

<sup>1</sup> Amen dico vobis, quia unus vestrum me traditurus est.—Numquid ego sum Domine?—Matt. xxvi. 21, 22.

<sup>2</sup> Lata porta et spatiosa via est quæ ducit ad perditionem; et multi sunt qui intrant per eam. Quam angusta porta et arcta via est, quæ ducit ad vitam, et pauci sunt qui inveniunt eam.—Matt. vii. 13, 14.

<sup>3</sup> Duo erunt in agro; unus assumetur, et unus relinquetur.—Ibid. xxiv. 40.



of two praying in the temple, the public sinner was taken, the Pharisee left; of the two disciples, Matthias was taken, Judas left; of the two companions of Christ on the cross, one went to paradise, the other to hell. What am I saying? One out of two? Of all the men on earth, for every thousand that go to hell hardly one goes to heaven. The holy Fathers make the number of the elect still smaller. The holy Scripture compares it to the grapes that are overlooked in the vineyard after the vintage: "Wo is me, for I am become as one that gleaneth in autumn the grapes of the vintage."<sup>1</sup> Such is the lamentation of the Prophet Micheas. "Many are called, but few chosen;" what a terrible truth! Should we not be troubled and anxious? Yes, my dear brethren, yet I should say no also! Let those be afraid and tremble who do not fear sin and their God!

But you, good Catholic Christians, who serve the Lord, and endeavor to live according to the law of the Gospel, although you now and then commit a fault through weakness, "Fear not, little flock," I say to you hardily in the words of our dear Lord, "for it hath pleased your Father to give you a kingdom."<sup>2</sup> Be of good heart! For, tell me this, if you were of the number of the few who are called to heaven, would your joy be less than if there were more of you? What joy it is for the student to get a hint from some one that knows all about it that he will get a golden book at the end of the year, although only two such books are to be distributed in the whole school! The days seem too long to him until the time comes when he is to stand on the stage; at night he dreams of it, and thinks he holds the book already in his hand; only two, he says to himself, only two among a hundred are to get a prize, and I am one of them. How much greater then must not be the consolation of the soul who can think: I shall receive the everlasting reward! I am one of those who shall go to heaven, although there are but a few of them! Let the world go as it will; I shall go to heaven! If I am now poor and needy, what does it matter? I shall go to heaven! I pass my life in pains and sickness, in destitution and persecution; what of that? I shall go to heaven! I have now to toil and labor; but there is one thing to console me: I shall go to heaven! I know not how, when, or where I shall

Meanwhile good Christians must be comforted, and rejoice that they are among the few.

<sup>1</sup> Vae mihi, quia factus sum sicut qui colligit in autumnu racemos vindemiae.—Micheas vii. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Nolite timere, pusillus grex, quia complacuit Patri vestro dare vobis regnum.—Luke xii. 32.

die; but no matter how, when, or where I die, I shall go to heaven! I shall see my God forever! I shall be eternally happy with my God! Oh, truly, this thought brings a joy that far surpasses all sensual delights and pleasures of the vain world.

For they  
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wish.

Yes, you say, that is true enough; and would I not be glad if I could say and think that of myself with truth! But who knows that heaven is to be my portion? And why should you doubt it, pious Christians? It is to you I speak, and all may be like you if they only wish. Why should you doubt it? For I ask you again: who can prevent you from gaining heaven? Who could or would exclude you from the number of the elect, small though it is? No man on earth, no demon in hell, no angel in heaven. It is on yourselves alone that that depends, and I presume you do not wish to prevent your own salvation? Men may indeed plague and persecute you, but they have no power to deprive you of heaven. The devils would do it if they could; they do their worst by suggestions and temptations, and disturbances, but they cannot bring you one foot from the way of salvation, unless you give yourselves over to them of your own accord. The angels could not and would not hinder your salvation, for their great desire is to have you as their companions. God indeed could hinder it, but He will not; He is a true God, who has promised you heaven if you serve Him to the end. Are you minded to do that? To understand the basis and foundation of this truth: on whom does it depend that the number of the elect is small? On God, because He wishes only a few to be saved? or on men, because only a few of them strive for heaven? It depends on the latter. Mark this: be it as it may with predestination, as it is called, or the eternal election to heaven, explain it as you may, it still is and remains an article of faith that God will take to Himself in heaven all those who persevere in good, and die in the state of grace: "He that shall persevere unto the end, he shall be saved,"<sup>1</sup> these are the words of the Eternal Truth. It is and will be true that in the present arrangements of His providence God elects none for heaven but those whom He foresees shall leave this world in the state of grace; whether He foresees this before or after the election is a question that theologians may fight about; it comes to the same thing in the end. It is and remains true also that God rejects none but those who, as He

<sup>1</sup> Qui autem perseveraverit usque in finem, hic salvos erit.—Matt. x. 22.

foresees, will remain in the state of mortal sin till death. Therefore heaven belongs to him who has the efficacious will to be faithful to God till the end and to persevere in good. If you sell anything, such as house-furniture, clothes, books, etc., by public auction, you call out the name of the article, or lift it up so that every one may see it. Who wants this? you cry out; who will buy this article? This costs so much; the value of this other is so-and-so; who wishes to purchase? Now he who offers the highest price becomes the possessor of the article. Such, in my opinion, is the way in which the Almighty offers heaven to men; He holds it up before them. Hear and see, whoever has ears and eyes! Heaven is offered you, and at a very low price; you need not bring gold or silver; who will buy it? Who wishes to have it? "Who is the man that desireth life, who loveth to see good days?"<sup>1</sup> What do you offer? What price will you give? St. Augustine takes from us all fear of not being able to purchase such a costly and in itself priceless treasure, or of not being in a position to pay the sum required for it; all we want is the will: "Give me the man who is willing, and it is enough."<sup>2</sup> He who wishes, has heaven; it belongs to him; not a farthing more is required; he need only wish, but his wish must be earnest, true, and constant. Once for all, no one who has a good will and leads a Christian life shall go to hell with the reprobate; no one whose will is bad and who leads a wicked life shall, unless he repents, be among the elect in heaven.

Again, it is and remains an article of faith that God, as far as in Him lies, has the earnest and true will and desire to make all men, without exception, eternally happy. "Who will have all men to be saved," says St. Paul, "and to come to the knowledge of the truth."<sup>3</sup> He condemns the sinner to hell against His inclination and general will, as we see clearly from the words of St. Peter: "The Lord delayeth not His promise, as some imagine, but dealeth patiently for your sake, not willing that any should perish, but that all should return to penance,"<sup>4</sup> and so escape damnation. And it is God Himself who says this. Suppose He could speak an untruth, why should He

God has the earnest will to choose them.

<sup>1</sup> Quis est homo qui vult vitam; diligit dies videre bonos?—Ps. xxxiii. 13.

<sup>2</sup> De volentem et sufficit.

<sup>3</sup> Qui omnes homines vult salvos fieri, et ad agnitionem veritatis venire.—I. Tim. ii. 4.

<sup>4</sup> Non tardat Dominus promissionem suam, sicut quidam existimant; sed patienter agit propter vos, nolens, aliquos perire, sed omnes ad poenitentiam reverti.—II. Pet. iii. 9.

wish to deceive us in this matter? And what profit or pleasure could He have in excluding a man from heaven without his fault, and sending him to the eternal fire of hell? To suspect Him of that would be the same as to look on Him as a most cruel tyrant. What do you think, fathers and mothers? Would it be a pleasant sight for you to behold your innocent child, who has done no wrong, burning in a fierce fire, and howling and tossing about in agony on glowing coals? What pleasure or joy could the Almighty have in seeing a soul that He has made to His own image and likeness, to which He is a better and more lovable Father than any earthly father is to his children—what pleasure could He have in seeing that soul burn forever in hell, and that without any fault on its part, and solely because He so wills it? If that is so, then why has He taken such trouble about the salvation of that soul? Who is there who will go a-fishing and wish to catch nothing? Who will cast the seed on the field and not desire to reap a crop? Who goes a-hunting and does not wish to bring down the game? If God did not desire our salvation, He might have remained in heaven, and need not have come down on earth and become Man. Why has He suffered so much discomfort, heat, cold, hunger, thirst, shame, mockery, thorns, scourges, nails, and a disgraceful death on the cross for our sake? Was it done perhaps only for the elect, and not for those who shall go to hell? But that is a heretical proposition, and has been condemned long ago by the true Church. No; as the Apostle says, Christ suffered death for each and every man: “For there is one God, and one Mediator of God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a redemption for all,”<sup>1</sup> and therefore who wishes all to gain heaven.

And will  
give them  
means  
enough to  
secure pre-  
destination.

Finally, it is and remains an article of faith that as we cannot perform any meritorious, supernatural work without His aid and help, the same God has prepared for all men, without exception, sufficient means and graces to enable them, if they wish, to do good, to persevere in good, and to gain heaven. And how can it be otherwise? If faith did not teach us that, we should learn it from the mere light of reason. For how could God expect me to fly through the air if He did not give me a pair of wings? How could He expect a dumb man to speak when He

<sup>1</sup> Unus enim Deus, unus et mediator Dei et hominum, homo Christus Jesus; qui dedit redemptionem semetipsum pro omnibus.—1. Tim. ii. 5, 6.

has deprived him of speech? How could He command a blind man to see when his eyes are put out? Now God commands all men to do good, and to work for their salvation, and that under pain of eternal damnation; He knows at the same time that it is a greater impossibility for them to do good and gain heaven with their mere natural powers than it is for them to see without eyes, to speak without a tongue, to fly without wings; how then could He refuse His help to any one? No; God does not order us to do impossibilities, as the Council of Trent says. The just man can, if he wishes, remain in the state of grace to the end; the sinner can, if he wishes, obtain that grace; and consequently all, if they wish, can be saved.

Now to come to my subject. It depends then on yourselves, my dear brethren, whether you go to heaven or not. You can be in the number of the elect if you wish it; no one can, no one will oppose or prevent you. Is not that a sufficient certainty? Is not that reason enough for you to feel rejoiced and comforted? Heaven is mine, if I will! Is he to be considered a poor man who can be rich if he chooses? Has he cause to be troubled who, if he wishes, can have all imaginable joys and delights? We have our will in our own hands. And if most men are lost, why should I despair on that account? If the smaller number is elected to heaven, am I therefore less certain of my salvation? Eh! the greater number will be damned, because it is their own wish. Nor am I a bit surprised at this. Consider only how people generally live in the world. How much continual sin there is, how little true repentance! How great a desire of temporal things, how little care for eternity! What pride, vanity, greed of gold, injustice, impurity, gluttony, cursing, disunion, laziness, and sloth in the divine service are not found everywhere! If the life that most men lead could bring one to heaven, then who should not go there? Meanwhile if I am of good will, although I must have pity on the deplorable blindness of those who damn themselves, yet I have not an atom more to fear on account of their damnation, or to dread lest I should have to go with them; but on the other hand I have every reason to comfort myself with the hope that I shall be with the few who are chosen, provided only I continue to serve God faithfully. If the majority of the people of Treves were so foolish as to throw themselves into the Moselle, must the few of us who remain be therefore afraid of being drowned? Not by any

Hence they have no reason to fear on account of the fewness of the elect, but rather to hope all the more.

means. Let those who wish leap in after the foolish people; as far as I am concerned I shall be very far from imitating their example, and that I may have as little to dread on that score as possible, I will keep away from the water altogether, and stay at home. Twenty are invited to a feast; fifteen excuse themselves; are you therefore afraid of being excluded? What do the others concern you? It depends on yourself whether or not you accept the invitation. Such is the parable in which Our Lord represents heaven in the Gospel of St. Luke: "A certain man made a great supper, and invited many. And they began all at once to make excuse."<sup>1</sup> But the table was not on that account empty, for others were invited who took the places of those who excused themselves. In a word, if only one of a hundred thousand is to be saved, provided I lead a good life, I am sure to be that one; on the other hand, if only one of a hundred thousand is to be damned, I shall be that one if I do not live piously. Therefore, good and pious Christians, what does it matter to you whether the number of the elect is great or small? You are among the few, if you wish, and that you do so wish is proved by your zeal and fervor in serving God. Only continue, and for the rest: "Fear not, for it hath pleased your Father to give you a kingdom;" and you may be as sure of it as that God is a faithful God. "Few are chosen." Those words should increase your hopes of salvation, pious Christians! They should also lessen your fear, as I shall show in the

### Second Part.

The pious  
have sure  
signs that  
they are  
among the  
elect.

We must not imagine that the number of the elect is in itself small and insignificant, for it is certain that a vast number of men shall enter heaven; so says the Prophet of the friends of God: "I will number them, and they shall be multiplied above the sand."<sup>2</sup> And St. John too, in the Apocalypse, saw a great number of them, after having found twelve thousand signed of each tribe of Israel: "After this I saw a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and tribes, and peoples, and tongues standing before the throne, and in sight of the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Homo quidam fecit cœnam magnam, et vocavit multos. Et cœperunt simul omnes excusare.—Luke xiv. 16, 18.

<sup>2</sup> Dinumerabo eos, et super arenam multiplicabuntur.—Ps. cxxxviii. 18.

<sup>3</sup> Post hæc vidi turbam magnam quam dinumerare nemo poterat ex omnibus gentibus, et tribubus, et populis, et linguis, stantes ante thronum, et in conspectu Agni, amicti stolis albis et palmæ in manibus eorum.—Apoc. vii. 9.

The elect are few when compared to the damned. But no matter how few they are, there must be a certain class of people in the world who belong to them. And who else belong to that class if pious Christians do not? St. Paul, in his Epistle to the Romans, describes the marks of the elect: "Whom He predestinated, them He also called. And whom He called, them He also justified: and whom He justified, them He also glorified."<sup>1</sup> These are the very marks you must recognize in yourselves, or rather in the goodness with which God has forestalled you. God has called all men, and invited them to heaven; but His call to you has been a special one. For all men He has prepared the means of justification, but He has shown special care in putting them in your way. To all men He offers the crown of glory if they persevere in grace; but to you He has given special signs of this perseverance and of gaining heaven.

With regard to the vocation, could you desire a clearer or more evident sign of His good will towards you? Do you doubt of this? Then let us examine the matter. Look at people in all parts of the world, whatever be their age or condition (and I speak not of those who lived from the beginning of time till the present, but only of those who are still on earth); compare your state and vocation with theirs. You will find that the greater part of the globe is inhabited by people who have no faith, or at all events no knowledge of the one true and only saving faith. How many millions there are of heathens, idolaters, Turks, Jews, infidels, who are completely shut out from Christianity? And among Christians, how many heretics there are, of different sects, who live outside the true, that is, the Catholic Church? And amongst Catholics, how many wicked people there are who have only the name of Catholic, by which they call themselves merely from a worldly motive, while in reality they believe in nothing, neither in heaven, nor in hell, nor even in God (oh, how many atheists of the kind there are nowadays!); or at all events, they live as if there were neither heaven, nor hell, nor God; or otherwise they do not fulfil the duties and obligations of their religion, without which their faith is dead? How many there are who heap injustice on injustice, until they almost despair of making due restitution? How many who make a habit of those vices of which the Apostle says that they who do

For they are specially called to heaven.

<sup>1</sup> Quos autem predestinavit, hos et vocavit. Et quos vocavit, hos et justificavit: quos autem justificavit, illos et glorificavit.—Rom. viii. 30.

such things shall not obtain the kingdom of God?<sup>1</sup> How many others there are who, although they do not indulge in great vices, yet lead careless and indifferent lives, following all the vanities of the world, and taking no more trouble about their salvation than if heaven was not of the least concern to them? Now put all this vast, immense crowd together; blot them all out of the list of the elect, if they do not repent; and then count the remainder; oh, what a small number they are, compared to the others! For but few will remain who show their faith by their works, live according to the law of their faith, earnestly endeavor to save their souls, and carefully avoid sin, or if they fall into sin, are at once uneasy and restless until they have truly repented. In a word, how small the number of truly good Christians who love God with all their hearts and earnestly desire to go to heaven! And there is no doubt that this small number shall gain heaven; for, whom else is it prepared for? It is to this small number that God has called you, pious Christians, and selected you in preference to so many thousand others by His powerful grace. Remember the grace that David received when, while he was still a poor shepherd boy and the youngest of his brothers, God chose him and placed a royal crown on his head. All his brothers, one after the other, were brought before Samuel, who was sent as an ambassador on the part of God to choose a king for the people of Israel out of this family. The first appeared, and God said: I do not want him: "I have rejected him." The next came: "Neither hath the Lord chosen this." Then appeared the third: "Neither hath the Lord chosen this." The other brothers were then assembled, but "the Lord hath not chosen any one of these." Finally the young David was brought in, and hardly had Samuel laid eyes on the youthful shepherd boy than he placed his prophetic hand on his head, looked into his face, and said to his poor father: This is the one whom the Lord has chosen; "this is he."<sup>2</sup> This is he whom God has selected to be ruler and king over His people of Israel; he is destined to wear the crown and sceptre, and to ascend the throne. There you have a sketch of your special calling to the heavenly crown, pious Christians! All infidels, Turks, Jews, heretics, and wicked Christians are also called to heaven, and the providence

<sup>1</sup> Quoniam qui talia agunt regnum Dei non consequuntur.—Gal. v. 21.

<sup>2</sup> Abiecit eum. Nec hunc elegit Dominus. Etiam hunc non elegit Dominus. Non elegit Dominus ex istis. Ipse est.—1. Kings xvi. 7-10, 12.



of God has given them means enough to gain it; but as far as the special, extraordinary, efficacious graces are concerned, we might say of those people: "The Lord hath not chosen any one of these"—not chosen them in the same way in which He has called the little flock of the pious. Is not that an evident sign that He has destined for you the crown of glory?

And this all the more, because "whom He called, them He also justified." That is, by a special help of His powerful grace He has led them to justice and kept them therein. Has not that been the case with you? Remember, as far as you can, how kindly and wonderfully the providence of God has guided you on the way of salvation from your childhood, and kept you on it till now. You have been the object of His special care even while still in your mother's womb; for He did not allow you to die without baptism, as has been the case with so many other children. And how was it with you afterwards? Consider the favor that the infant Moses found in the sight of the daughter of Pharaoh; he was already condemned to death while still in swaddling-clothes, when the princess saw him; at once she had him taken out of the water and brought to her, and she adopted him as her own; after that she gave him to his own mother as a child destined to become a great man among the Egyptians. "Take this child," she said, "and nurse him for me.... The woman took and nursed the child: and when he was grown up she delivered him to Pharaoh's daughter. And she adopted him for a son."<sup>1</sup> With reason might you wonder at the goodness of this princess, and at the favor she conferred gratuitously on the child. But what must you think of that gratuitous and unmerited grace by which God adopted you as His own from the first moment of your existence; so that hardly were you born into this world when He drew you, not to death, but to eternal life in the saving waters of baptism, and gave you over to your mother, the Catholic Church, that she might feed you with salutary doctrine? For He has caused you to be born in a Catholic country, and brought up by Catholic parents, a grace not granted to so many thousand others. He has caused you to be instructed from your youth in the true faith by your pious parents or by others. He has, by His inward inspirations, by the admonitions of your pastor, given you a love of virtue, a hatred and

God justifies them specially.

<sup>1</sup> Accipe puerum istum, et nutri mihl.... Suscepit mulier, et nutritiv puerum: adultumque tradidit filiae Pharaonis, quem illa adoptavit in locum filii.—Exod. ii. 9, 10.

fear of grievous sin. He has kept you from many occasions of sin, protected you in dangers and temptations; and even when you have fallen often and grievously, He has rescued you from that unhappy state by remorse of conscience, by causing you to hear sermons or to read spiritual books. The sincere purpose you had to repent of past misdeeds, the self-denial with which you disclosed abominable sins in confession; your present horror of all that you have formerly loved against the divine law, your earnest wish to save your souls, nay, the fear and anxiety you sometimes feel lest you do not serve God as you ought: all these come from the good God; they are all graces that He has given you in preference to so many millions of other people. To what end? Is it that you may be lost, as you fear? Are these signs of reprobation? Oh, no! they who are thus called and justified, and who follow the call and endeavor to do the works of justice, these are also they whom He has chosen: "Them He also glorified." These are they to whom He will give a crown of glory; that is the way in which He has led all who are now in heaven; and to you, as to them, He will grant eternal happiness.

It is probable, too, that they will persevere to the end.

Ah, you say, but there is still one thing that lies like a stone on our hearts! What is it? If I am now, as I imagine, pious; if I cannot accuse myself of any mortal sin that I have not confessed, yet I know not how I shall be at the end. All depends on the last moment; perseverance crowns the work. If I die an unhappy death, the good life I am leading will not help me. Such is indeed the case, my dear brethren; but have you any reason to think that the end will be bad for the soul that tries to serve God, or at all events to repent of its sins? that a Christian who has led a good life will die a bad death? A good end depends partly on God, inasmuch as He must continue to show His goodness, and to give the grace of perseverance; and partly on ourselves, inasmuch as we must continue to serve God.

Since neither God nor they themselves will hinder that perseverance.

And as far as you are concerned, do you imagine that after all the trouble you have taken to abstain from forbidden pleasures in order to go to heaven, although you might have enjoyed those pleasures, do you imagine, I ask, that you will be likely to choose hell with a deliberate and perverse act of the will for the sake of some pleasure or profit, at the time when you are on the point of leaving everything, and the gate of heaven is standing open for you? There is not much likelihood of that.

And as far as God is concerned, do you think that He is likely to refuse His help at the very moment when it is most wanted? What a cruel thing it would be for a father, after having carried his son in his arms all the day through a dangerous forest that he might bring him safe home, to throw him down in the evening just as he arrives at the door of his house, and break his neck? And shall God, that good Lord, that kind and loving Father, who has showered so many graces on me during the day of my life, who has given me so many benefits, looked after me so carefully, received me so mercifully after I had fallen, and that often, carried me in His hands, as it were, through so many dangers, for the sole purpose of bringing me to heaven—shall that God, I ask, leave me to my own weakness, give me over to the hellish bird of prey, reject and condemn me forever at the very moment when I am only a step removed from eternity? Is that the time when He will withdraw His hand from me? But who dare think such a thing, not to speak of having reason to dread it? Therefore I say to myself, encouraged and consoled, as the mother of Samuel said to her husband: “If the Lord had a mind to kill us, He would not have received a holocaust and libations at our hands, neither would He have showed us all these things.”<sup>1</sup> If my God wished to reject and condemn me, why should He have shown such patience in bearing with me? why have forestalled me with so many graces? why shown me so much love? Ah, since He has been a thousand times provoked to anger by my sins, He could easily do with me as He has done with so many others, and have allowed me to die in my sins. He had already given me proofs enough of His mercy, and had cause enough to show His justice by punishing me. But now since He has spared me, and given me time and leisure to confess my sins and amend my life; since He has, up to the present moment, accepted my service and kept in me the good will to serve Him in future, all this proves to me that He means to carry out to the end the work of my salvation, which His mercy has begun and continued up to the present. Such, too, should be your thoughts, pious Christians, and you should console yourselves with the assurance given you by St. Paul: “He who hath begun a good work in you will perfect it unto the day of Christ Jesus.”<sup>2</sup> Only lead good lives, and then, as far as the end is

<sup>1</sup> Si Dominus nos vellet occidere, de manibus nostris holocaustum et libamenta non suscepisset, nec ostendisset nobis hæc omnia.—Judges xiii. 23.

<sup>2</sup> Qui cepit in vobis opus bonum, perficiet usque in diem Christi Jesu.—Philipp. i. 6.

They have  
other marks  
of predesti-  
nation.

concerned, you may leave it in the hands of the good God.

Time does not permit me to speak of the other signs of the elect, which are given by the holy Fathers on the authority of Scripture, such as to feel pleasure in hearing the word of God, and to have a desire for it in order to learn and to do something good. This is one of the surest signs of predestination,<sup>1</sup> as St. Augustine says, for we are always ready to speak of our native land and of those whom we love. "Blessed are they who hear the word of God and keep it,"<sup>2</sup> so says the Eternal Truth Himself. Another sign is a constant, anxious care in all one's actions not to do anything displeasing to God; or if one falls, to repent at once; for as it is a sign of reprobation to defer repentance from day to day, as St. Isidore says, so it is a mark of the chosen children of God not to be able to bear sin on the conscience for a long time. The third sign is union with and true love for one's neighbor, and especially for one's enemies: "By this shall all men know that you are My disciples, if you have love one for another."<sup>3</sup> The fourth sign is mercy and charity towards the poor, to the suffering souls in purgatory, as well as to the needy on earth: "Blessed are the merciful."<sup>4</sup> Never, says St. Jerome, have I found him to die an unhappy death who willingly performed the works of mercy and charity. Nay, this alone shall be brought forward on the last day instead of any other good work, as that for which an eternal reward is to be given. The fifth sign is patience in bearing crosses and adversity: "Blessed are the poor; blessed are they that mourn; blessed are they that suffer persecution: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."<sup>5</sup> The sixth sign is the frequent reception of the sacraments, especially of holy Communion; for these are pledges given by God to the souls that He has chosen for heaven: "He that eateth this bread shall live forever."<sup>6</sup> The seventh sign is devotion to Mary, the Mother of God; and in this all the holy Fathers are of one mind. Oh, when that name comes into my mind, it fills my heart with fire! Take all the other signs away and only leave me this one; leave me, besides a good life, only

<sup>1</sup> Nullum majus signum æternæ prædestinationis est, quam audire libenter verbum Dei.

<sup>2</sup> Beati qui audiunt verbum Dei, et custodiunt illud.—Luke xi. 28.

<sup>3</sup> In hoc cognoscent omnes, quia discipuli mei estis, si dilectionem habuerit is ad invicem.—John xiii. 35.

<sup>4</sup> Beati misericordes.—Matt. v. 7.

<sup>5</sup> Beati pauperes; beati qui lugent; beati qui persecutionem patiuntur, quoniam ipsorum est regnum cælorum.—Ibid. iii. 5, 10.

<sup>6</sup> Qui manducat hunc panem vivet in æternum.—John vi. 50.

the love of this most holy Virgin, and I can make sure of a happy death and a blissful eternity. I acknowledge, my dear brethren, to the honor and glory of this holy Mother, that whenever I am afraid at the thought of what is to happen to me after death, if I only think of Mary, my fear is changed into hope and consolation. Ah, honor and love sincerely the Mother of God! The eighth sign is the complete resignation of one's self to the will of God, even in what concerns our salvation. This latter point I shall treat of separately in another sermon, and shall prove that a pious man can comfort himself with the assured hope of salvation, even because he leaves the care of it with childlike confidence altogether to God.

See now, pious Christians! I believe that there is none of you who has not these signs, or some of them at least. Therefore I say again by way of conclusion: "Fear not, little flock, for it hath pleased your Father to give you a kingdom." Fear not, I say, you who are chosen for heaven, and that is the name given by SS. Peter and Paul in their Epistles to the early Christians: "Fear not, for it hath pleased your Father to give you a kingdom." Only continue to serve your well-meaning God with zeal and constancy, and you can expect with humble indeed, yet joyful hearts, that beautiful dwelling that you now behold from a distance as your future inheritance. The thought, I am going to heaven, will arm you against all the difficulties, annoyances, and contradictions that occur in the divine service. But you, sinners and tepid Christians! do you wish to go to heaven? You too may, if you desire it, be in the number of the elect. If that is your earnest wish, then take to heart the advice of Casian: "Live with the few, that you may deserve to be chosen with the few, and to be found in heaven."<sup>1</sup> In the broad highway one wanders away farther and farther from heaven. To live as others, and indeed most do, to behave as others, and indeed most behave, is to go on the broad road to eternal ruin. Live therefore with the few.

Hence the just should comfort themselves with the hope of salvation, and sinners should begin to live with the few.

As far as I am concerned, I shall keep on their side, and, what I have not done for a long time, work zealously for my salvation. I thank Thee, my God, for having brought me to the right road to heaven. Now I have one request to make of Thee with Thy servant David, "Perfect Thou my goings in Thy paths, that my

Conclusion and purpose to serve God cheerfully.

<sup>1</sup> *Vive ergo cum paucis, ut cum paucis eligi, et inveniri merearis in coelo.*

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footsteps be not moved,"<sup>1</sup> that I may continue to fear sin, to love Thee above all things with my whole heart; and then no misfortune in the world, no torment in hell shall be able to terrify me. Although I believe that few are chosen, yet I am not the less certain and assured that a pious Christian shall not be lost forever; if I have no absolute certainty that I am in the number of the elect (for Thou hast concealed this from me to keep me in humility), yet I know that Thou desirest my salvation and that I shall infallibly be saved if I only wish it. Again, I know not whether I shall persevere in this wish; I am not completely certain of it, but I am absolutely certain that Thou art a merciful Lord, who wilt accompany the pious Christian with Thy grace and help to the very gate of death; I know that he who trusts in Thee will not be lost forever, "for I know whom I have believed, and I am certain that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him, against that day."<sup>2</sup> With this hope I will rejoice in this vale of tears, as Thou hast commanded me and all Thy servants: "Be glad and rejoice, for your reward is very great in heaven."<sup>3</sup> My dear brethren, let us pray together, and together lead a Christian life, so that we may rejoice together and be happy with each other in heaven. Amen.

*Another introduction to the same sermon for the second  
Sunday after Easter.*

### Text.

*Cognosco meas, et cognoscunt me meas.*—John x. 14.

"I know Mine, and Mine know Me."

### Introduction.

What are those sheep that know Jesus, and are known by Him? It is not of unreasoning animals that He speaks here; for He alludes to the sheep whom He commanded St. Peter to feed, when He said: "Feed My sheep."<sup>4</sup> They are human souls, whom He purchased with His precious blood; and it is only of those souls that He speaks in to-day's Gospel, of whom He says

<sup>1</sup> *Pertice gressus meos in semitis tuis, ut non moveantur vestigia mea.*—Ps. xvi. 5.

<sup>2</sup> *Scio cui credidi, et certus sum, quia potens est depositum meum servare in illum diem.*—II. Tim. i. 12.

<sup>3</sup> *Gaudete et exultate, quoniam merces vestra copiosa est in cœlis.*—Matt. v. 12.

<sup>4</sup> *Pasce oves meas.*—John xxi. 17.

elsewhere: "He shall separate them one from another, as the shepherd separateth the sheep from the goats; and He shall set the sheep on His right hand,"<sup>1</sup> namely those who are chosen for heaven. These Our Lord knows, no matter where or who they are, as the Church says in the prayer: "O God! to whom alone is known the number of the elect, who are to be endowed with eternal happiness," etc. These elect know Him too; they hear His voice and follow Him like obedient sheep wherever He wishes to lead them. My dear brethren, are we all in the number of these sheep who are chosen for heaven? Ah, wo and eternal wo to him who is not in that number! This is the fourth and most violent assault that often tempts and disturbs us, especially when we think of the words: "Many are called, but few chosen." This is the thought that sometimes makes pious souls timid and downhearted, while it drives the wicked to despair. Yet, good Christians who serve the Lord, do not fear this assault! If you are only in earnest about avoiding the sins you have repented of, and serving your God faithfully, then you are of those sheep whom Jesus knows; who, as Jesus knows, shall gain eternal happiness, and you have no reason to fear on account of the small number of the elect, but rather cause for rejoicing, as I shall now show, etc. *Continues as above.*

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**SEVENTIETH SERMON.**

**ON THE CONSOLATION OF THE JUST IN KNOWING NOTHING  
OF THEIR PREDESTINATION.**

**Subject.**

1. Even this must be a consolation to us, that we know nothing certain about our predestination, or election to grace. 2. It must be a still greater consolation for us to know the means by which we can make our predestination sure and certain.—*Preached on the feast of St. Matthias the Apostle.*

**Text.**

*Tollite jugum meum super vos, . . . et invenietis requiem animabus vestris.*—Matt. xi. 29.

"Take up My yoke upon you, . . . and you shall find rest to your souls."

<sup>1</sup> Separabit eos ab invicem, sicut pastor segregat oves ab hœdis; et statuet oves quidem a dexteris suis.—Matt. xxv. 32, 33.

## Introduction.

On the feast we celebrate to-day we honor the memory of him who was elected to the apostolate in place of the traitor Judas. As the Acts of the Apostles tell us, the disciples of Our Lord met together, in order to take counsel about this election. It was an important matter, for it concerned a high and difficult charge, for which only one of their number was to be chosen. Therefore they did not trust to their own ideas about it, but appealed to the all-knowing God. "And praying, they said: Thou, Lord, who knowest the hearts of all men, show whether of these two Thou hast chosen." After this prayer they cast lots, and "the lot fell upon Matthias, and he was numbered with the eleven apostles."<sup>1</sup> My dear brethren, there is a much weightier matter and question that concerns us all, namely, who out of so many millions of men are to be chosen for heaven. Oh, what a question! And who will answer it for us? Should we not, like the disciples, appeal to God, and say: "Thou, Lord, who knowest the hearts of all men, show whom Thou hast chosen"? O Lord! behold there are many assembled in this church; Thou knowest how matters stand with all of them; Thou knowest those who are elected for heaven, as well as those who are doomed for hell; we beg of Thee, show us whom Thou hast chosen, that we may know them! Am I in that number? Will this man and that go to heaven? But why should I ask such curious and silly questions, and wish to know what Thou hast kept to Thyself as a secret, and which, even if I did know it, would not be of any use to me, but would rather harm me? It should suffice for the comfort and quiet of my soul to know that Thou hast given me the means of securing my salvation, if I wish to do so; for Thou hast said to me and all men: "Take up My yoke upon you, and you shall find rest to your souls." So it is, my dear brethren; it is an unnecessary and foolish thing to be uneasy about unlaid eggs, as to whether they will be broken or not; see first that you get them, and then you can take care not to let them fall. Such seems to me the anxiety of those who are always thinking whether or not they will gain heaven, whether or not they are predestined, and meanwhile they take little trouble about that by which they can and should make their predestination certain. I will show to-day:

<sup>1</sup> Et orantes dixerunt: tu Domine, qui corda nostri omnium, ostende quem elegeris ex his duobus unum. Et cecidit sors super Matthiam, et annumeratus est cum undecim apostolis.—Acts I. 24, 26.



Plan of Discourse.

*First, that even this must be a consolation for us, that we know nothing about our being predestined, or elected to grace; and this shall be the first part. Secondly, that it must be a still greater consolation for us to know the means by which we can make our predestination sure and certain; the second part. From which we must draw this conclusion: that we must devote all our attention to this latter point, and quietly leave the former to the good God.*

We expect the help of the Holy Ghost through the hands of Mary and the intercession of our guardian angels.

We have reason to be comforted and rejoiced, rather than sad and anxious, because that is concealed from us the knowledge of which could not be of any service to us, but rather dangerous and injurious, while our ignorance of it is good and beneficial. For who would think himself fortunate to find out something, the experience of which brings him no advantage, but plenty of disquiet and harm? How often do we not hear sorrowful sighs to this effect: ah, would I had known nothing about it! Such is the complaint of many a father who has had bad news of his son; such the complaint of many a loving husband who thought his wife a model of virtue, but has found out that there is cause to suspect her of being unfaithful. Hence it often happens that we hide our woes from our friends, lest we should disturb and trouble them about a matter which they cannot remedy.

Such is the loving and kindly manner in which Divine Providence acts towards us by leaving us mortals in the darkness of night, as far as eternity is concerned, and hiding from us the place we have to expect there. For how could the knowledge of it serve us? Not in any way, but it would be very likely to be dangerous and hurtful; while on the other hand it is more useful and helpful to our salvation to be in ignorance of it. You often think and say with anxious and downcast heart: ah, how am I to fare in eternity? On what side shall I stand? On the right, among the sheep? or on the left, with the goats? Shall I be chosen for eternal glory, or condemned to everlasting torments? Now supposing you knew all about this, what would you do?

Suppose God sent an angel to announce to you your future state; he brings you the most joyful and desirable news that your name is written in the Book of Life, among the elect chil-

It is well to be ignorant of a thing the knowledge of which is dangerous and hurtful, while it is useful not to know it.

So it is with our ignorance regarding our salvation.

For if we knew that we are predestined,

that knowl-  
edge would  
not serve us.

dren of God. Oh, how you would leap with joy! Is not that the case? But what advantage would the news be to you? Would it make you any better off than you are now? Would the way to heaven, which before seemed narrow and rude to you, become broader, more pleasant, and less difficult? Would your bad passions and evil inclinations be stilled and extirpated? Would creatures and sensible objects have less power to attract you? Would the enemies of your soul be less able to attack you? Would your own free will be less subject to change, less inclined to evil? You would indeed hold in your hands the assurance of your salvation; but that is prepared for you only in consideration of your piety; so that in spite of this assurance you must still conquer your passions, restrain your senses, mortify the flesh, keep your heart free from the world and its vanities, confess your sins and do penance for them, pardon your enemies from your heart, make restitution of injured honor or property, carefully avoid the occasions of sin, take up your cross and bear it patiently. There is not a doubt that you would still have to observe all this. So that the revelation you receive would leave you the same difficulties to overcome, the same obligations to fulfil as now, when no such revelation has been made to you. Therefore while God leaves you in ignorance on the point, fulfil the same obligations, live as the Christian law and the divine will require, and you will not need the angel, and will certainly be found among the elect at the end.

If we knew  
the con-  
trary, we  
should fall  
into despair.

Suppose that the news is quite different, and that the contrary is announced to you, and may God and our own wills guard us from that! Suppose that there is no place for you in heaven, and that on account of your sins and final impenitence you are among the reprobate: how would that revelation please you? Oh, what an evil plight you would be in! How great would be your terror, dread, despair! what a hell you would have on earth! What an intolerable cross to have the thought always obtruding itself on your mind, like a grisly phantom: I shall be damned! How could you bear your own self? How could you look up to heaven, in which you would know you have no part? How would you not complain of God, who not content with rejecting you for all eternity, does not even give you during this life the slight satisfaction and repose, either of a hope of salvation or of an uncertainty regarding your damnation? You would say to Him what the demons said to Our Lord when He drove them out of

the bodies of the possessed: "What have we to do with Thee? . . . Art Thou come hither to torment us before the time?"<sup>1</sup> Would we not have known our punishment soon enough hereafter? Thus you see that to know of your salvation does not lessen your difficulties; and to know that you will be damned only adds to your torment and despair. Neither knowledge is good for anything.

Nay, both would be, moreover, very dangerous and hurtful to us. For, in the first place, would they who are assured of their salvation be always so well on their guard as not sometimes to taste the pleasures of the world and the flesh, which have already such a natural attraction? These things are as pleasing to the just as they are to sinners. What now keeps the former away from them is the fear and love of God, which the latter have not; what impels the just to mortify themselves and abstain from the forbidden pleasures is the desire of heaven, which sinners have forgotten. Now, if there is no fear of being damned, no dread of the divine anger, if heaven is assured to us, would that not place us in the evident danger of becoming more daring, and indulging freely in those pleasures which, besides the apparent happiness they bring, would not entail any danger of eternal punishment? Ah, the true and perfect love of God, that loves Him simply because He is in Himself worthy of all love, is now so rare amongst us! The more the good God inundates us with benefits the more we sometimes abuse His kindness. We now believe in and fear an eternal fire, and yet we sometimes plunge blindly into sin! We know that we are not safe from death for a moment, and yet we sometimes spend days and weeks in the state of sin, without trying to free ourselves from it by repentance. In the midst of the dangers that beset our salvation, in spite of our ignorance regarding it, we often live as if we were sure of heaven; how would it be then if we actually held this assurance in our hands? if on account of this assurance neither death, nor judgment, nor hell had power to frighten us? Yes; I can readily believe that we should lead much merrier lives, but I cannot conceive it possible that we should become more pious; at all events there would be great danger on that score.

And what sort of a life would the others lead, if assured of their damnation? It is a horrible thing even to think of! No vice so abominable into which they would not rush and wallow

The former knowledge would be bad for the elect.

The latter for the reprobate.

<sup>1</sup> Quid nobis et tibi? Venisti huc ante tempus torquere nos?—Matt. viii. 29.

like swine in the mire, through sheer desperation; for as they could have no hope of enjoying themselves in eternity, they would take as much pleasure as possible out of this life. What grievous disorders would not arise in the world in such a state of things! For on the one side would be the elect, who would have nothing to fear on account of the assurance of salvation; on the other the reprobate, who would have nothing to hope for, and would give themselves up to sin through despair of salvation. And even if the elect loved God and performed good works, would they not be persecuted, oppressed, and tormented in every way by the others who would be in the majority, and who would feel the utmost envy and hatred of them? Thus there would be an end to peace, union, and friendship, not only between nations, but also in private houses among parents and children, brothers and sisters. How did Esau act when he learned that his brother Jacob had deprived him of his father's blessing? He "roared out with a great cry," says the Scripture; nay, he was so angry that he determined to slay his brother. "Esau therefore always hated Jacob for the blessing wherewith his father had blessed him; and he said in his heart: The days will come of the mourning of my father, and I will kill my brother Jacob."<sup>1</sup> How did not Cain act merely because God had looked favorably on the sacrifice of his brother Abel, and had disregarded his? From that time he could not bear the sight of his brother: "Cain was exceeding angry, and his countenance fell;"<sup>2</sup> he had neither rest nor ease until he had murdered Abel. Now you can see for yourselves the harm and mischief that would ensue, not only in the minds of men, but over the whole world in general, if we knew what our final sentence is to be.

The ignorance of both is very useful to us.

Is it not, on the contrary, a thousand times better and more useful for us that God has told us nothing concerning this matter? Truly, says St. Prosper, "the final determination of Providence regarding us is kept hidden from us that we may be humble and filled with a holy fear, and that he that stands may take heed lest he fall."<sup>3</sup> What would become of our faith, hope, charity, religion, and other virtues, if we had not humility, which

<sup>1</sup> Irrugit clamore magno. Oderat ergo semper Esau Jacob, pro benedictione qua benedixerat ei pater: dixitque in corde suo: venient dies luctus patris mei, et occidam Jacob fratrem meum.—Gen. xxvii. 34, 41.

<sup>2</sup> Iratusque est Cain vehementer, et concidit vultus ejus.—Ibid. iv. 5.

<sup>3</sup> Præfinitio electionis abscondita est, ut perseverantem humilitatem, utiles metus servet, et qui stat, videat ne cadat.

is the foundation and guardian of all virtue? How would it be with us if we were not obliged to be on the watch in order not to forget the duties and obligations of our state? if we had no zeal, which constitutes the greatest value and price of our good works? For the preservation of these virtues, the ignorance in which we are regarding our future destiny is useful, nay, even necessary. For when I think: I am in the hands of God, who can either admit me into heaven or cast me into hell, and I know not which He will do with me, how can I give way to pride? Must I not humble myself with the utmost reverence before such a Lord, and acknowledge His supreme sovereignty over me, and my complete dependence on Him? If I think to myself: I know not who is to go to heaven or to be sentenced to hell, have I any reason to extol myself or imagine I am better than others? Even the most abject beggar may have a high place in heaven, while I may have to suffer eternal torments. Even he who is now a most wicked sinner may perhaps do penance in a short time and save his soul; for, as St. Augustine beautifully says, "We see what they are to-day; what they may be to-morrow we know not."<sup>1</sup> Nor do I know how it will be with myself; have I then cause to be proud? There you have humility. If I think to myself: I am still in danger of being lost eternally, shall I not then be careful to avoid all the occasions of sin? Shall I not be exact in fulfilling all the obligations of my state? There you have watchfulness. If I think to myself: I am not yet sure of my salvation, shall I not then put forward every effort to make sure of such great happiness? There you have zeal, and with it the foundation of all the virtues and good works, which foundation rests on the ignorance in which we are regarding predestination.

Eternal thanks to Thee, O God of infinite wisdom! for having kept from us this secret of our eternal destiny. Oh, truly, it is a consoling ignorance that brings so much good, and leads us all the more securely on the way of salvation, and keeps us thereon; while on the other hand the knowledge of this mystery would be useless and dangerous to us, or else would cause injury, disturbance, and despair. Let us then, my dear brethren, put away all fear and useless investigations regarding what is to happen to us in eternity; we should rather be rejoiced and comforted that we know nothing about it, and be satisfied with doing what God

Hence it should be a source of consolation and joy.

<sup>1</sup> Quid enim sint hodie videmus; quid cras futuri sint, ignoramus.

has prescribed to attain salvation, according to the advice of the wise Ecclesiasticus: "Seek not the things that are too high for thee, and search not into things that are above thy ability: and in many of His works be not curious; but the things that God hath commanded thee, think on them always."<sup>1</sup> Such too is the exhortation given us by St. Peter: "Wherefore, brethren, labor the more that by good works you may make sure your calling and election."<sup>2</sup> This is the only thing that deserves all our care and attention during this life, and it is a great source of comfort to us that we have some knowledge of it, as we shall see in the

### Second Part.

We should be in an evil plight if God had not given us the means of working out our salvation.

If, besides concealing from us our future destiny, God had not revealed to us the means of attaining salvation, then, my dear brethren, our lot would be a deplorable one; we should be like those who are shipwrecked on a rock or desert island, and have no means of rescue at hand, so that all they can do is to keep a look-out for some passing vessel to take them away. The same, I say, would be our state if we knew nothing more than that we are in the hands of God for good or evil fortune, and that we must blindly await whatever He is pleased to do with us. Then there would be some reason for those silly, rash, and unchristian words and thoughts of those heretics and bad Catholics, who say: I will do as I please; if God wishes to bring me to heaven I am all right, although I do no good works. I shall do as I please; for if God wishes me to go to hell I shall be damned, although I do no evil. We read in the life of John Duns Scotus, the subtle Doctor, a member of the Franciscan Order, of a man who once spoke in that way. This learned Doctor once met a peasant who was cursing and swearing in fearful style against his oxen, because they did not pull properly. The Father warned him not to speak in that hellish language, reminded him of the danger of eternal damnation he incurred thereby, and advised him to give up that bad habit. But the peasant only grew more angry than before. What! he said, in wrathful tones; what are you saying about eternal damnation? If God has resolved to bring me to heaven (and He knows whether that is

<sup>1</sup> Altiora te ne quæsieris, et fortiora te ne scrutatus fueris; et in pluribus operibus ejus ne fueris curiosus; sed quæ præcepit tibi Deus, illa cogita semper.—Eccius. iii. 22.

<sup>2</sup> Quapropter fratres, magis satagite, ut per bona opera certam vestram vocationem et electionem faciatis.—II. Pet. i. 10.

the case or not), then I shall infallibly save my soul; but if He has determined to send me to hell, I shall be lost, no matter what I do. It does not matter much, then, whether I curse or not. Mark the stupid argument that it appears many Christians use nowadays, whose mouths are constantly full of oaths and curses. The man of God listened for a while and then said: My brother, if it is as you say, then why do you go into your field in order to plough it? Why do you sow the seed? Nay, why are you so angry with your oxen? If God, who knows all that is to happen, has resolved that you shall have a good crop, you will have it infallibly without sowing or ploughing, or driving out your oxen. But if He has determined that you shall not reap anything, you shall infallibly have no crop, in spite of all your labor. Meanwhile you can put the thing to the proof; go home and leave the field untilled; and if you do so, although I know not what God has resolved, yet I can infallibly assure you that you will not have one grain of corn from it. You must know that God has determined to grant you a crop only on condition that you work for it as you ought. In the same way God has resolved to make you eternally happy if you lead a good life and keep His law; but if you live wickedly He will send you to hell. This reasoning at last convinced the peasant, and he acknowledged his error.

So it is, my dear brethren; if we do not know what God has determined regarding our salvation, we know at least what we have to do and avoid, on account of which God has determined to bring us to heaven. If we do not know for certain that we shall save our souls, we do know for certain how we can save them, and we are infallibly sure that we shall go to heaven if we only make constant use of the means known to us; namely, if we avoid sin and live virtuously according to our state. Our salvation does not depend on God alone; our salvation does not depend on ourselves alone. God must give us the help of His grace, and, as we have seen, we are sure of that; and we must co-operate with Him and do good works, and that depends on our own free will; thus we can and must work out our salvation. God has created us without ourselves, says St. Augustine, but He will not save us without ourselves.<sup>1</sup> It is not the will of God, nor His eternal election, but our good or bad works that will determine the final sentence. "Come, ye blessed," He will

But now we know the means by which we can certainly save our souls if we use them.

<sup>1</sup> Qui fecit te sine te, non justificat te sine te.

say, "possess you the kingdom prepared for you." Why prepared for you? Because I have predestined you to it? No, but because "I was hungry, and you gave Me to eat,"<sup>1</sup> and so on. "Depart from Me, you cursed," He will say to the reprobate. Cursed by whom? asks St. John Chrysostom. By My Father, or by Me? No, but by yourselves, and your own sinful works, which you did not repent of before death. Go "into everlasting fire which was prepared for the devil and his angels."<sup>2</sup> It was not prepared for you, nor for any other human being, for My cross and passion opened heaven to all men; but since of your free wicked will you have, contrary to My will, done the works of the devil, and deserved the fire prepared for him, go now and be companions of his punishment. Thus my salvation depends on God's help and my works at the same time.

Hence we  
have reason  
to rejoice.

What a consolation for me! And what a sure foundation for my hope! If my salvation depended on God alone, so that I could have no act or part in it, then I might perhaps be anxious and uneasy, not knowing what the Lord's intentions are in my regard; for He is absolute Master of His glory, and can give it or refuse it to me as He pleases without doing me an injustice. And if my salvation depended on myself alone, and God did not wish to have anything to do with it, oh, then should I have still greater reason for fear and anxiety on account of my weakness, inconstancy, evil inclinations, temptations of the devil, and the many sins and faults I commit daily. For I see that in spite of the manifold helps that God daily gives me with such generosity I stumble so often on the way of salvation; how would it then be with me, O God! if Thou didst abandon me on this way and leave me to my own weakness, not helping me or forestalling me with Thy grace? Oh, no; Thou couldst not have arranged matters better for my advantage and consolation than by ordaining that Thou and I should work together to secure my salvation! Now I know for certain that Thou wilt not be wanting in Thy part; therefore my salvation depends on myself, that is, on my constant co-operation with Thy grace.

And they  
act foolish-  
ly who are  
anxious  
about pre-

What folly it would then be for me to stand still and anxiously investigate and inquire into that which Thou hast concealed from me, which I can not and should not know, and the knowledge of which would not serve me, but rather be danger-

<sup>1</sup> Venite benedicti, possidete paratum vobis regnum. Esurivi enim et dedistis mihi manducare.—Matt. xxv. 34, 35.

<sup>2</sup> Qui paratus est diabolo et angelis ejus.—Ibid. 41.



ous and hurtful to me, and meanwhile pay no attention to that which I do know to be of positive help to secure my eternal predestination! How foolish to ask or think whether I shall be saved, while I wantonly neglect the means of salvation! What would you think, my dear brethren, of the man who gets up early in the morning to go to a certain town; he knows the way well, and knows that he can do it in a day easily; but while on the journey he begins to doubt and say to himself: perhaps I shall lose my way; perhaps I shall get tired before evening; perhaps the gates of the town will be closed before I arrive? These thoughts make him anxious and uncomfortable; he sits down under a tree, and will not take another step forward until he is sure of arriving that evening; but there is no one who can tell him that, and his arrival depends on himself alone. Yes, if you stay where you are, it is certain that you will not arrive either to-day or to-morrow, or the day after, unless an angel comes and takes you by the hair like the Prophet Habacuc, and thus brings you to your journey's end. You had better wait to see if he will come! Such, my dear brethren, is the folly of those who stand still on their way to the heavenly Jerusalem, and give themselves no trouble or make no effort to keep the commandments of God, by the observance of which alone they are well aware that heaven is to be granted, until they have first anxiously inquired whether they shall be saved or not. Foolish mortals, who will tell you that? But I can assure you, and venture to foretell you that in the way you are acting you will certainly not reach the town or gain heaven.

“Brethren, labor the more that by good works you may make sure your calling and election.” It is the performance of good works that should occupy all our attention; this we should investigate with a holy curiosity, and often ask ourselves, not: shall I go to heaven? but: how do I live? how is it with my conscience? what are my works? what have I done hitherto? what am I minded to do in future in order to gain heaven? If I do good, then I should believe or hope that I am in the number of the elect. If I serve my God constantly to the end, I am assured of His promise, which cannot deceive me, that I shall go to heaven. Therefore, as far as I possibly can, I will avoid all sin; if I have fallen, I will at once repent sincerely and make a good confession; in a word, I will serve God zealously, and abandon all other cares and fears, leaving altogether to the just,

destination, but neglect the means of salvation. Shown by an example.

Exhortation and purpose to serve God zealously, and leave the care of our salvation to Him.

good, and merciful God, who loves me so much, the last sentence that is to be passed on me and the eternity that is in store for me, with sure hope and childlike confidence. And, says Novarinus, this is a sign of predestination; namely, when one serves God with zeal and perfect resignation to His holy will and childlike confidence, without any desire to know what God intends doing with him in eternity;<sup>1</sup> such are his words. On the other hand, to be always curiously investigating this mystery could make one reasonably doubt whether he who does so is in the number of the elect; nay, this curiosity is a sign that one is not in the number of the sheep of Jesus Christ, as St. Basil well says: "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me, and I give them life everlasting."<sup>2</sup> They do not dispute with the Shepherd nor discuss what He intends doing with them.<sup>3</sup> It was only the prodigal son who wished to look into his father's accounts and see what was the amount of his inheritance. The good son did nothing of the kind, but remained always with his father, without troubling about his inheritance; therefore he deserved to hear from his father the consoling words: "Son, thou art always with me, and all I have is thine."<sup>4</sup> Such, too, is the way in which the pious servant of God is wont to act; he faithfully loves and serves his heavenly Father, and for the rest he says cheerfully with the Prophet: "But I have put my trust in Thee, O Lord! I said: Thou art my God; my lots are in Thy hands."<sup>5</sup> I desire no happiness but what Thou, my God, art willing to give me! He who is thus minded shall certainly hear from God the same words: "Son, thou art always with Me, and all I have is thine" and shall be thine for all eternity. I shall show this more in detail on another occasion.

After the  
example of  
pious Chris-  
tians.

You are doubtless acquainted with that story from the Lives of the Fathers, which is so interesting that I will now remind you of it by way of conclusion. There lived in the desert two hermits celebrated for sanctity, a young man and an old one, who together served God day and night in the greatest union and friendship. The devil was mad with vexation at seeing all his temptations frustrated by them, and although he tried

<sup>1</sup> Quadam prædestinati nota est, æquo animo ferre se nescire esse prædestinatum.

<sup>2</sup> Oves meæ vocem meam audiunt, et ego cognosco eas, et sequuntur me; et ego vitam æternam do eis.—John x. 27, 28.

<sup>3</sup> Non disputant neque discutunt.

<sup>4</sup> Fili, tu semper mecum es, et omnia mea tua sunt.—Luke xv. 31.

<sup>5</sup> Ego autem in te speravi Domine; dixi: Deus meus es tu; in manibus tuis sortes meæ.—Ps. xxx. 15, 16.

to disturb them, for a long time he could not succeed. He then disguised himself as an angel of light, and appeared to the old man alone, while the latter was engaged in prayer; ah, servant of God, said he, what sad news God has sent me to bring you! Your companion is now indeed very pious and zealous in the divine service; but he will not persevere to the end, and therefore God will reject him and send him to hell forever; the divine decrees are unchangeable, so that no matter what he does he must be damned. Then the supposed angel vanished. You can easily imagine, my dear brethren, how the old hermit felt. Every time he looked at his companion his eyes overflowed with tears, and his deep sighs betrayed his inward sorrow. The young man noticing that this sadness lasted for a long time, said to him at last: Father, why are you so sorrowful when I meet you? Have I done anything to offend you? If so, only tell me, and I will readily beg pardon and amend my life. Ah, my son, replied the other, do not ask me for an explanation, for it would only add to my sorrow to give it; it is better for you to know nothing about it. But the young man insisted all the more and conjured him by the God whom they both served to make known the cause of his sorrow. Alas, my son, that I must say it! exclaimed the old man, overcome by his importunity; it is revealed to me from above that you are rejected by God, and will be sent to hell for all eternity. The young man was not at all terrified, and expected to hear something else. And is that all? he asked at length. Has the Lord told you nothing more? Is not that enough? replied the other. Could you have any worse tidings than that? Nonsense, answered the young man, laughing, that is nothing. I was afraid that God had told you of some secret sin that might have prevented me from being in His grace. If there is nothing to trouble you but that I am to be damned, you may dry your tears at once. I have served my God hitherto, not as a laborer for heaven alone, but as a child serves its loving father, who is worthy of all that is good, and therefore of all my service; with regard to eternity, He may do with me whatever He pleases. Come, let us rejoice in the Lord and serve Him; He is my Father and the Father of mercy; I abandon myself to Him in time and eternity. The old man could not sufficiently admire that hearty resolution, but immediately a real angel came from heaven and told him that he should pay no attention to the lies of the devil; that his com-

panion was enrolled in the Book of Life, and that of all the services he had rendered to God none pleased the Lord better than his undisturbed cheerfulness and trustful abandonment of his eternal destiny to the Almighty. Ah, my dear brethren, if we were all like this young hermit, if our only care was how we could best serve our heavenly Father during our lives, then our salvation would be secure. I repeat it: let us live a pious and Christian life, confidently and cheerfully hoping in the Lord, and leave to Him the care of our eternal welfare; thus we shall have here a life of consolation and hereafter eternal joys. For such is the assurance given us by St. Peter in the words I have quoted for you: "Wherefore, brethren, labor the more that by good works you may make sure your calling and election;" and he adds immediately: "For so an entrance shall be ministered to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."<sup>1</sup> Amen.

*Another introduction to the same sermon for the third Sunday after Easter.*

#### Text.

*Gaudebit cor vestrum, et gaudium vestrum nemo tollet a vobis.*  
—John xvi. 22.

"Your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man shall take from you."

#### Introduction.

Oh, if we could only have this assurance that the disciples heard from the lips of Christ! Now you are sorrowful, because I leave you to ascend into heaven; but be comforted; in a little while you shall see Me again in the place to which I am now going; then your hearts shall be filled with joy and your everlasting joy no man shall take from you. Ah, poor, miserable mortal that I am! I am still in this sorrowful vale of tears, surrounded by trials and dangers that threaten my salvation! I can go to heaven, and possess eternal joys if I wish! That is consoling so far; but how do I know what is to happen? If an angel came and assured me in the name of Our Lord that I am to be saved, then I could rejoice indeed. Such, my dear brethren,

<sup>1</sup> Sic enim abundanter ministrabitur vobis introitus in æternum regnum Domini nostri et Salvatoris Jesu Christi.—II. Pet. i. 10, 11.

ren, are the thoughts that often make us wretched and anxious. Meanwhile there are many who take little trouble about that which can and must make their predestination to heaven a matter of certainty. Ah, if I only knew that I shall go to heaven! And if you did know it, what then? I will show to-day in the first place, etc. *Continues as above.*

# ON SOME OF THE MARKS WHICH DISTINGUISH THE ELECT.

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## SEVENTY-FIRST SERMON.

### ON THE FREQUENT HEARING OF THE WORD OF GOD.

#### Subject.

To hear the word of God with good and very good heart in sermons is a sure sign of predestination to heaven.—*Preached on Sexagesima Sunday.*

#### Text.

*Quod autem in bonam terram, hi sunt qui in corde bono et optimo audientes verbum retinent.*—Luke viii. 15.

“But that on the good ground are they who in a good and very good heart, hearing the word, keep it.”

#### Introduction.

Jesus begins to cry out: Be attentive! “Saying these things He cried out: He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.” He must have been speaking of some important matter, which He wished to inculcate on the hearts of all men. Five times did the Lord on different occasions use the expression: “He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.” But never before did He cry out, as the Gospel says of Him to-day. “Saying these things He cried out.” What was He then speaking of? “The seed is the word of God.” It is sowed so often from the pulpit, and yet it bears so little fruit. Some do not listen to it because they never come to a sermon; others listen, but the devil takes it out of their hearts, so that they do not believe; others believe for a time, but when temptation comes they fall away; in others again the word of

God bears no fruit, because the multiplicity of worldly business and cares, and the riches and pleasures of life, distract them, so that the word of God is preached in vain to most men. It was this consideration that pressed that loud cry of complaint from the lips of Our Lord. He was afterwards buffeted, scourged, crowned with thorns, and nailed to the cross; but He did not cry out: "But Jesus held His peace."<sup>1</sup> Now, when there is question of hearing His word, He cries out. Therefore much, very much must depend on that hearing. And truly, my dear brethren, such is the case. Some years ago I showed, if you still remember, in four sermons, one after the other, that the hearing of the word of God in sermons is necessary for most men, and most useful for the salvation of all; and I have shown, too, how one should hear the word of God so as to derive fruit from it, and what is to be done before, during, and after the sermon. Would to God that all of you remembered what I then said, and always tried to fulfil it! And it is of those only who do so that my text speaks: "Who in a good and very good heart, hearing the word, keep it." For their consolation I now say:

**Plan of Discourse.**

*To hear the word of God in sermons with a good and very good heart is a sure sign of predestination to heaven. Rejoice then, dear children of God, who thus hear it! Such is the whole subject of this discourse.*

Holy Ghost, who preacheest to the heart, preserve in those good hearts their zeal and desire to hear with profit Thy divine word, that they may remain constant; inflame all others with the same desire, that they too may become diligent hearers; and meanwhile I will preach to their ears, relying on the necessary aid of Thy light, which I beg through the merits of Mary, the Mother of the divine Word, and the intercession of our holy guardian angels.

I must first briefly recall to your minds what I explained in detail in those other instructions, namely, who are they who hear the word of God in a good and very good heart; otherwise some might perhaps flatter themselves with the idea that they are true lovers of the divine word, while in reality they are not; or else they might be in doubt as to whether they are really to be reckoned among the good hearers. What then does it mean to hear

What it means to hear the word of God in a good heart.

<sup>1</sup> *Jesus autem tacebat.*—Matt. xxvi. 63.

the word in a good heart? It means to hear sermons willingly, with a zealous desire, with real earnestness, with interior savor, not otherwise than one who is hungry longs for the hour of dinner. Now this is not the case with those who seldom come to sermons, or if it happens to suit them to come once, stay away two, three, or four times without urgent necessity; nor with those whom wind, or rain, or heat, or cold, or the desire of sleeping longer can keep at home; others are kept away by confession and Communion (although for many it is sometimes more necessary for their salvation to hear a sermon than to receive the sacraments; since at that time God inspires the preacher with matter which would have helped them to confess and communicate devoutly their whole lives long, and that matter may never be repeated in the same place); others remain at home till the last sound of the bell, and generally come too late, as if it were a mortal sin to be in church for the beginning of the sermon; thus they understand little of what they hear, and cannot profit by it as they ought; some are content with a part of the sermon and go away without waiting for the end, although they are not absolutely obliged to do so; or if they hear the bell ring for a Mass during the sermon (and the bell should never be rung then) they run off to catch that Mass, and so separate themselves from the audience. All these show clearly they have no appetite or hunger for the food of the soul, nor true wish or desire to hear the word of God explained. A hungry man will not come too late to meals if he is warned in time. A hungry man will not go away from the table after he has taken a few mouthfuls of soup. Still less does a hungry man remain away from table altogether, if his place is marked for him.

And in a  
very good  
heart.

What then does it mean to hear the word of God in a very good heart? It means to come constantly to sermons, when one can, with a very good intention; to pay attention to what is said with a genuine desire to draw some spiritual profit from it, and after the sermon to do one's best to put into practice what one has heard. This is not done by those who come to the sermon through human respect, or merely to go with the crowd, or who come unwillingly for the sake of obeying their parents, or masters, or who come through curiosity, to hear something new, pleasant, or agreeable, or through vanity, to see and be seen, or who are actuated by many other merely natural motives. There are some whose bodies are present before the pulpit, but their



hearts and thoughts are elsewhere; some who, when certain vices are condemned, refer all they hear to others, and take nothing to themselves; some who, when they are touched on a sore point, become angry and indignant, and turn against the preacher who tells them the truth, which all preachers are bound to do in such cases, with modesty, when the divine honor and the welfare of souls require it; and their sole object must be to practice Christian charity, to win souls to God, to save them from hell, to bring them to heaven. Others again do not wish to believe what they hear because they are hardened and obdurate in their mind and wills on account of certain vices to which they are addicted, or the proximate occasion of sin which they do not wish to abandon, or through human respect and the desire to follow the customs of the world; what these people acknowledge to be true they try to put out of their minds with some excuse or other, nor do they make the least attempt at amendment, but as long as repentance does not suit them, stick to the old vices. All these are not in the number of those who hear the word of God in a very good heart. So that there remain of all whom we have examined only those who come to sermons diligently, and when no extraordinary obstacle arises, constantly, early enough, with a good intention and desire to be deterred from sin, encouraged to do good, instructed in divine things after having invoked the Holy Ghost; while their minds are eager and attentive in listening to the truths explained to the end, and in practising, when opportunity offers, what they have heard and learned to be pleasing to God. Oh, here I might well cry out with Our Lord: "Many are called, but few chosen!" Many are called on every Sunday and holy-day by the sound of the bell to hear the word of God; and sometimes many come, but there are few who hear the word in a good and very good heart. Yet there are many, and as far as I can judge from their edifying lives, the most of those present I hope are in the number of good hearers.

For their consolation I now repeat and prove the proposition I started with: that they can rejoice in having a certain mark of predestination, so that they shall one day see God in heaven, and love Him in eternal joys. The proof is not very difficult; I have on my side all the holy Fathers and spiritual authors, and they are unanimous on the point. For the sake of brevity I will quote only a few of them. "To have a good appetite,"

They who  
thus hear it  
have a mark  
of predesti-  
nation.  
Proved  
from the  
Fathers.

says St. John Chrysostom, "is a sign of good bodily health; so too it is a sure sign of a future eternal life when one is eager and desirous of hearing instructions and exhortations." The two disciples who were going to Emmaus, after having heard Our Lord, and felt their hearts inflamed with His words, as the Scripture says, had the happiness of seeing and recognizing Christ that evening. Hugh of St. Victor says of this: "Those therefore who on the way of this life have their hearts inflamed with love through the words of Jesus shall behold His glory at the end of their lives."<sup>1</sup> No one speaks more clearly on this point than the great St. Augustine: "He who willingly hears the word of God need not doubt that he has received a document from his heavenly country assuring him of the possession of it."<sup>2</sup> He need have no doubt of it. Nay, he is not satisfied with merely placing that eager desire of hearing the word of God among the signs of predestination, but boldly asserts that among all those signs there is none greater or more certain than this. The following are his words in his book on the Predestination of the Saints: "There is no surer sign of predestination than to hear the word of God willingly."<sup>3</sup> A sign of predestination is to perform the works of Christian charity and mercy; a sign of predestination is to be meek and humble of heart; a sign of predestination is to bear trials and crosses with patience; a sign of predestination is to love, and to do good to, and pray for those from whom one has received insults and injuries; a sign of predestination is constant conformity and contentment on the part of our will with the will of God; a sign of predestination is frequent, contrite confession and Communion; a sign, and indeed a great and certain sign of predestination is to have a devotion to and love for Mary, the Mother of God, and there are other signs too, but among them all there is none more sure than to hear the word of God willingly.

And from  
Scripture.

That doctrine is founded on the infallible testimony of eternal truth. Could Our Lord speak more clearly of it than He has done in the Gospel? "He that is of God," He says in the Gospel of St. John, "heareth the words of God."<sup>4</sup> He com-

<sup>1</sup> Qui ergo in via ex sermonibus Jesu ignem amoris corde concipiunt, in fine vite claritatem ejus videbunt.

<sup>2</sup> Qui verbum divinum libenter audit, de patria paradisi transmissas se suscepisse literas non dubitet.—S. Aug. hom. 26.

<sup>3</sup> Nullum majus signum eterne predestinationis est, quam audire libenter verbum Dei.—Idem de Prædest. c. 25.

<sup>4</sup> Qui ex Deo est, verba Dei audit.—John viii. 47.

parens His elect to sheep whom the angels shall separate from the goats on the last day and place on the right hand. Now who are the true sheep of Christ? Let Him tell us, for He knows best: "My sheep hear My voice." Do you wish to know who they are? Then see whether they hear My voice willingly; from that you will know whether they belong to Me or not. "I give them life everlasting; and they shall not perish forever, and no man shall pluck them out of My hand."<sup>1</sup> When the woman lifted up her voice to the Lord, saying: "Blessed is the womb that bore Thee," "Yea, rather," replied He at once, "blessed are they who hear the word of God and keep it."<sup>2</sup>

The very pith and marrow of the matter is this; there is no more powerful means of bringing men to eternal salvation than to hear the word of God in sermons. In two ways, say writers, does the hearing of sermons work the salvation of souls: "in the root and in the sign."<sup>3</sup> "In the sign," because it is a sign that heaven shall be their dwelling. Every man is willing to speak of his fatherland; he who is a native of Treves, although he may live fifty miles away from it, will talk of its glories with every mark of inward and outward pleasure. If you wish to know in a company who is for the emperor and who is French, only begin to talk of the emperor, his power, and skilful government, and you will soon see from the countenances and manner of those present whom they favor. If one makes a sour face, and shows displeasure, although he says a few cold words of assent, you may be sure that he is not for the emperor. If he is a good German, he will listen to you with every mark of lively approval. In the same way, Christians, one can see from what you hear with eagerness and pleasure what countrymen you are; what is your fatherland; whether you are lovers of God or not; whether you belong to heaven or not. "He that is of God, heareth the words of God." When I see one who, if nothing special occurs to prevent him, is constant and eager in hearing the word of God explained in sermons, although I cannot see his heart, yet I unhesitatingly come to the conclusion that he is a pious soul and must have a good will; for fervor and eagerness in hearing divine things often is a sure sign that a

From the nature and effects of hearing the word of God one can be seen to belong to heaven.

<sup>1</sup> Oves meæ vocem meam audiunt. Ego vitam æternam do eis, et non peribunt in æternum, et non rapiet eas quisquam de manu meâ.—John x. 27, 28.

<sup>2</sup> Beatus venter qui te portavit. Quinimmo beati qui audiunt verbum Dei, et custodiunt illud.—Luke xi. 27, 28.

<sup>3</sup> In radice et in signo.—Stella, in cap. xi. Luc.

## 440 *On the Frequent Hearing of the Word of God.*

man loves God, and that heaven is his fatherland, since he is so pleased to hear it spoken of. And if I am deceived in my opinion, that man must have been able to disguise his feelings in a most remarkable way.

It nour-  
ishes and  
preserves  
the soul in  
good.

Again, the hearing of sermons works the salvation of the soul "in the root." That is, just as the root brings to the tree and all its branches the sap which makes it grow, so souls receive in the hearing of sermons the spiritual nourishment whereby they are strengthened against temptations, maintained in good, and further impelled to produce worthy and copious fruits of salvation. For in what does preaching consist? Let that wonderful preacher, St. Francis de Sales, tell us, who by this means converted countless sinners to true penance, and brought seventy-two thousand heretics to the true faith. Preaching, he says, is the revelation and explanation of the will of God in regard to men, drawn from the divine word to instruct and exhort men to serve the divine majesty in this life, that they may be happy in the next. This is the two-edged sword, as St. Paul says, which can pierce the heart of the most obdurate sinner, if he only wishes to hear it, and impel him to surrender at last to God by true repentance: "The word of God is living and effectual, and more piercing than any two-edged sword, and reaching unto the division of the soul and the spirit."<sup>1</sup> The Prophet David calls it a bright light, which shines in the darkness, so that we may not fall amid the dangers that surround us, or wander away from the true path to heaven. "Thy word is a lamp to my feet, and a light to my paths,"<sup>2</sup> says the Prophet to God. Enlightened by it, I have resolved never to be unfaithful to Thy law: "I have sworn and am determined to keep the judgments of Thy justice."<sup>3</sup> Our dear Lord calls it sometimes a seed: "The seed is the word of God," which when it falls on a good heart brings forth fruit of eternal life; sometimes a net, which, cast into the sea of the world, draws forth souls from it, as fishes belonging to the table of the Lord. The word of God is a shield, says St. Jerome, by which Christians who hear it well and properly defend and protect themselves against the enemies of their souls. It is a fertilizing rain, says St. John Chrysostom, that moistens and bedews the heart, so that it may not grow dry in

<sup>1</sup> *Vivus est enim sermo Dei et efficax, et penetrabilior omni gladio ancipiti, et pertingens usque ad divisionem animæ ac spiritus.*—Heb. iv. 12.

<sup>2</sup> *Lucerna pedibus meis verbum tuum, et lumen semitis meis.*—Ps. cxviii. 107.

<sup>3</sup> *Juravi et statui custodire judicia justitiæ tuæ.*—Ibid. 106.

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the love of God. It is the bread of the strong, the milk of the weak, according to St. Augustine.

Hence there have been at all times so many wonderful conversions of sinners, so much progress in others to a high degree of sanctity, who otherwise would hardly have thought of their salvation or perfection, if they had not by chance or the effect of some inward inspiration from God come to hear a sermon. There are books in which you will find examples enough of the kind. I will relate to you one of each sort. Heroldus writes of an undutiful son (alas, how many such there are nowadays!) who, on account of the bad training he got from his parents, became so wicked that he committed incest with his own sister, slew in a fit of passion his brother, who reproved him for his wicked actions, and most cruelly put an end to his father, who had disinherited his unnatural son; then, through despair in God's mercy and fear of suffering the penalty of his crimes, he went into a foreign land, and being there unknown, spent many years in all sorts of vice, during which time he never went to confession, or Communion, or heard Mass, or entered a church, his fixed purpose being to go to hell. Oh, truly unhappy man! what could be done for him? How was he to be brought back on the road to heaven, who had no other intention than to go to hell? And yet there was one means at hand—a means by which God in the present dispensations of His Providence is wont to touch the heart and grant the light of His grace, that is, the hearing of His divine word. In the same town in which the despairing man lived there was a new preacher who had come to deliver a course of Lenten sermons to the crowds who flocked to hear him. The poor man, seeing the people thronging daily to the church, went with them one day to find out what was going on. To his great good fortune the subject treated of happened to be the wonderful patience and long-suffering of the Almighty towards the sinner, and the endless mercy with which He is always ready to receive the penitent and contrite of heart; every word he heard was like an arrow piercing the very marrow of his bones, so that, completely changed and with tears in his eyes, he ran to the priest after the sermon, and falling at his feet, made a general confession of his whole life, and while thus engaged, he was so overpowered by sorrow and contrition that he fell dead on the spot.

Wonderful conversions have been effected by even once hearing the word of God. Shown by an example.

Oh, my God! I must here cry out, how wonderful is Thy still greater

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is the benefit derived by those who hear it often.

great mercy! But at the same time, word of God, how wonderful is thy power! If thou canst change the heart that, still rebellious, obdurate, and determined to be lost forever, happens to hear thee by chance, what good wilt thou not effect in those pious hearts who hear thee with due preparation, and with the desire of being enlightened and moved, and hear Thee diligently? One of these was the young man of whom Cataneus writes. As he was wont to come regularly to sermons, he once heard about the vanity of the world, the slavery endured by the children of the world, and how they have to plague and torment themselves for temporal things; and on the other hand, the preacher depicted the happiness of the servants of God, who, under the sweet yoke of Jesus Christ, attended solely to their salvation, and were sure of carrying away the kingdom of heaven. This sermon moved him to such an extent that he at once bade good-bye to father and mother, renounced his inheritance, clothed himself with rough sack-cloth, and barefooted went to the desert, as convents were not in such numbers then, there to spend the rest of his life as a poor hermit. On the way he was met by one of his former companions on horseback, who, seeing the destitute state of his comrade, said to him: Sir, is it really you? Have you been robbed? Truly, replied the other, I have been robbed, and the thieves have taken everything from me. And where are they? asked his friend, spurring up his horse and grasping a pistol; where have they gone to? Calm yourself, said the young servant of God, laying hand on the bridle; I will show you the thief. So saying, he took out of his pocket the Holy Scriptures—the only thing he had in his possession; here is the dear robber who has plundered me of everything; the word of God that I have heard has robbed me of all temporal things. In the same way the great St. Anthony was induced to lead a life of the utmost austerity, after having only once heard the words: “If thou wilt be perfect, go, sell what thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.”<sup>1</sup>

Confirmed by experience.

What the word of God effected in these and hundreds of similar cases, giving those who heard such admirable constancy of purpose, is still effected daily by sermons, which inspire the good hearts of hearers with salutary and holy resolutions. I appeal

<sup>1</sup> Si vis perfectus esse, vende, vende quæ habes, et da pauperibus, et habebis thesaurum in cælo; et veni, sequere me.—Matt. xix. 21.

to all who are accustomed to frequent sermons to testify to the truth of this. Do they not always feel some good movement in the heart, which urges them to avoid this or that vice, to practise this or that virtue, a movement that they would not have felt so keenly otherwise, that they would perhaps never have thought of had they remained away from the sermon? Nor can it be otherwise; no matter what is the subject treated of, a soul desirous of salvation can always find some good thought in it, and God is forced by His own promise to give on such occasions a grace that is bound to work good in the hearts of the hearers. With reason has a certain author left us these remarkable words in his writings: I have, he says, for more than fifty years looked for three sorts of men in the world, and never found them, nor even heard of them; an industrious man in want of bread; a sober man whose life was shortened; and a diligent hearer of the word of God who did not lead a good and Christian life. Sooner will you see a miracle than see a man who comes regularly to sermons with a good will live wickedly or be addicted to great vices. We cannot doubt the words of St. Augustine: "there is no greater mark of predestination than to hear willingly the word of God."

What am I now to think or say of him who for a whole year, seldom or never, or only by chance, hears a sermon; either because he does not like it and has no relish for the word of God, or because he despises it and imagines he is learned and clever enough, and so has no need of being instructed, or through a most mistaken idea that he can live piously and gain heaven without hearing sermons, or through laziness and sloth, which make him unwilling to mortify himself so far as to sacrifice an hour's sleep for God's sake, or through the multiplicity of worldly cares, which render him unwilling to give even one hour on Sundays and holy-days for the good of his soul, or through fear lest the truth should be told him, and his way of life found fault with? What am I to think of him? I must only leave him to God, who will judge us. If SS. Chrysostom, Bernard, Augustine, Gregory, speak the truth, he is in a bad way. Oh, it is a bad sign and the beginning of rebellion against God to have no desire to hear His word, "which a soul that loves God always hungers for."<sup>1</sup> No wisdom or learning is so great as not to stand in need of the enlightenment and impulse of the Holy Ghost, who, generally speaking,

They are then to be pitied who seldom hear the word of God.

<sup>1</sup> Quod semper anima esurit, quæ diligit Deum.

has in the present dispensation of His Providence attached the granting of His light to the hearing of His word for those who have the opportunity of hearing it. Ordinarily speaking, they who imagine they are not in need of sermons are more in want of them than others, as those sick persons are in a more dangerous state who think they are well. It is not easy to be pious and remain so, when one neglects the opportunities of hearing the word of God. A clock, no matter how well it is made, will soon stop and strike no more if it is not wound up. A man, no matter how pious he is, since his corrupt nature is always inclined to evil, will soon decrease in piety, or at all events, not lead the life that God desires, unless he is at certain times encouraged to good. If they whose hearts are sunk in and attached to earthly things can derive little profit even from sermons, because, as Our Lord says in to-day's Gospel, the seed is choked by thorns, that is, by the cares, riches, and pleasures of life, how will it be with him who, occupied the whole week with temporal things, never comes to hear anything good about heavenly and eternal riches?

They are marked as not belonging to the elect.

The emperor Albert once asked his court preacher if men such as he had about him would be saved. Yes, was the answer, if they happen to die in their cradles immediately after baptism; otherwise it would be very difficult. Why so? asked the emperor. What is the greatest obstacle to their salvation? This especially, replied the preacher: that they either despise or neglect the word of God, and thus deprive themselves of the best means of salvation. Be that as it may, the terrible words of Our Lord are well known. After having said, "He that is of God heareth the words of God," He turned to the scribes and Pharisees and said to them: "Therefore you hear them not, because you are not of God."<sup>1</sup> Alas, what a terrible sentence! But after all, are they not as badly off who never come to sermons? One thing I should like to whisper in the ears of such people, namely, the prayer of the Church: Dear souls! souls purchased at such a high price! souls created for heaven alone! "let us so pass through temporal goods as not to lose eternal riches!" If you are busied the whole week with temporal concerns, at least give to your souls one hour of rest and refreshment; if you seek so eagerly the comfort of the body, at least grant your souls their necessary nourishment. "What doth it profit a man if he

<sup>1</sup> Propterea vos non auditis, quia ex Deo non estis.—John viii. 47.



gain the whole world and suffer the loss of his own soul?"<sup>1</sup>

I turn to you again, pious souls, who in spite of difficulties hear the word of God in a good and very good heart, as I explained at the commencement. Rejoice and be glad! You give your God the best proof that you wish to be with Him in heaven; and God too gives you the best proof that He wishes to have you with Him there. To you I may well apply the consoling words that St. Peter wrote to those who believed in Christ on the testimony of the preaching of the apostles: "You are a chosen generation, . . . a holy nation, a purchased people, that you may declare His virtues who hath called you out of darkness into His marvellous light."<sup>2</sup> One thing I say by way of conclusion in the words of Our Lord: "Walk whilst you have the light, that the darkness overtake you not. Whilst you have the light, believe in the light, that you may be the children of light,"<sup>3</sup> and always remain so. Continue to seek the bread of the soul with a hungry eagerness; constantly renew this holy desire of hearing the word of God; fervently beg of God to preserve and increase in you this desire. When the time for the sermon approaches, let no business be so important, no sleep so sweet, no company so pleasant, no hour so early, no weather so harsh, as to keep you from coming. Whenever St. John Chrysostom, the teacher of all preachers, remarked that only a few of his usual hearers were present at the sermon, he used to sigh and lament; and he gives the reason of his sadness on the occasion: "Like a loving mother, who has prepared the meal, and seeing that not all her children are present, grieves and is ill at ease (why is my son or daughter not at table? she asks; is there anything the matter? perhaps he or she is ill, etc.), so too do I feel with regard to those who are absent, since they cannot receive the food of their souls."<sup>4</sup>

Encouragement to the pious to continue to be diligent in hearing the word of God.

Continue to frequent the church in order to hear sermons, but with no other end and object than to be instructed in good, to know the truths taught, and to put them in practice. There are many sermons preached in different places on Sundays and

With no other object but to grow in piety and ensure their salvation.

<sup>1</sup> Quid prodest homini, si mundum universum lucretur, animæ vero suæ detrimentum patietur?—Matt. xvi. 26.

<sup>2</sup> Vos autem genus electum gens sancta, populus acquisitionis; ut virtutes annuntietis ejus qui de tenebris vos vocavit in admirabile lumen suum.—I. Peter ii. 9.

<sup>3</sup> Ambulate dum lucem habetis, ut non vos tenebræ comprehendant. Dum lucem habetis, credite in lucem, ut filii lucis sitis.—John xii. 35, 36.

<sup>4</sup> Sicut eni pia mater mensam apponens, non omnibus filiis præsentibus dolet et gemit; hoc et ego nunc patior.

holy-days; you have liberty to select whichever you please; the same food may be prepared in different ways by different cooks; one relishes it in this, another in that way; he who wishes to enjoy good health must choose what he knows by experience to be best for him, nor must he care what cook has prepared it, or whether the food is costly or cheap. In the same manner the word of God may be preached and explained in different ways by different preachers. One is pleased with this, another with that mode of preaching. He who loves his soul, and earnestly desires to hear sermons with the right end in view, will select the sermon which he knows will better and more clearly explain the truth, be more apt to touch his conscience, and give him a greater impulse to good, nor will he trouble himself about the preacher, by whose mouth God announces His word, no matter how he preaches. Finally, dear Christians, continue to keep the word, and on that most, nay, all depends: "Hearing the word, keep it." That is, what you have learned in the sermon to be useful or necessary to gain heaven; what you know to be conformable to the life of Christ and His saints, and agreeable to the will of God, that endeavor to practise with all possible diligence. "There is no surer sign of predestination than willingly to hear the word of God;" no surer sign that you are children of God, and that you shall stand among the sheep of Christ at His right hand, than to hear the word of God in the manner explained. Almighty God of infinite goodness! Thou hast created our souls by the power of Thy word; Thou hast redeemed them from eternal death by Thy incarnate Son; by the hearing of Thy word Thou art willing to sow the good seed in our souls, to grant us copious graces, and to lead us on the right path to heaven; grant us also that this seed may fall on good ground always; that Thy word may be received in good hearts and bring forth the fruit that Thou desirest from us; so that after having reaped the harvest we may rejoice in Thy kingdom of heaven forever with Thee, and Thy incarnate word, and the Holy Ghost. Amen.

*On hearing the word of God, see several sermons in the preceding first, second, third, and fourth parts.*

**SEVENTY-SECOND SERMON.**

**ON FREQUENT AND WORTHY COMMUNION.**

**Subject.**

Frequent and worthy Communion is a sure sign of predestination to heaven; this is evident: 1. from the nature and properties of the Blessed Sacrament; 2. from its effects.—*Preached on the feast of Corpus Christi.*

**Text.**

*Qui manducat hunc panem, vivet in æternum.*—John vi. 52.  
“If any man eat of this bread he shall live forever.”

**Introduction.**

Wonderful invention of the love of Jesus Christ for us mortals! He was not satisfied with suffering so much torment, insult and injury, fear and anguish, and even the shameful death of the cross for us; besides all this He has left us His own most sacred body and blood in a most wonderful manner in the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar, as the food and drink of our souls. We are all invited to enjoy this food, not once, but often; and to encourage us to approach His table frequently He has given the cheering promise: “If any man eat of this bread he shall live forever.” And yet how deplorable our stupidity! How ready we are in finding excuses to keep us away from this sacred table, so that the Catholic Church has been obliged to compel us by a command under pain of eternal damnation to approach it! Alas, what a sign of misfortune that is! A sign that we shall have no share in the heavenly banquet, as Christ Himself threatens in the Gospel of St. Luke: “But I say unto you, that none of those men that were invited shall taste of My supper.”<sup>1</sup> Why so? Because to receive this supper or the holy Communion frequently and worthily is a sure sign of election to heaven, as I shall now prove. From this, too, it is clear that to approach this table seldom is a sign of reprobation. For the comfort of all frequent communicants, and to impel all Christians

<sup>1</sup> Dico autem vobis, quod nemo virorum illorum, qui vocati sunt, gustabit coenam meam.  
—Luke xiv. 24.

to follow their example, I repeat the proposition, and make the division of my sermon:

#### Plan of Discourse.

*Frequent and worthy Communion is a sure sign of predestination to heaven; this is clear from the nature and properties of the Blessed Sacrament: the first part. It is clear from the effects of this sacrament: the second part.*

Christ Jesus, force us all by Thy powerful grace to Thy holy table, that we may often, as Thou desirest, approach it with eagerness; this we beg of Thee through the intercession of Thy holy Mother Mary and of our holy guardian angels.

The proper food of the human body is bread; and it is a sign of illness to have no appetite for it.

According to the species and kind of the animals that God has created, so also is the species and kind of food that the same all-providing God has prepared and ordained for their nourishment and the preservation of their lives. To eagles He has given the birds, to lions the wild animals of the forest, to horses oats, to oxen hay, to sheep grass, to dogs bones, to swine bran and offal; but to men alone, properly speaking, bread; for whenever in the Holy Scripture mention is made of human food, bread is nearly always spoken of; and in the Lord's Prayer, which Christ has taught us, we pray for nothing in the way of food but our daily bread: "Give us this day our daily bread." We have, of course, seen and heard of men who eat earth, lime, coals, as if those things were delicacies; but who does not know that such things are unnatural food, and that the desire of them proceeds from some unusual and unhealthy condition of the body? Otherwise the food of man is and will be bread, and it is enough to cause a famine if bread alone be scarce or wanting. Again it is a sign of good bodily health when every animal likes its proper food. With regard to men it is clear, and experience teaches, that the dislike to bread is the first sign of some inward complaint; and as soon as the sick man begins to eat bread again with appetite it is taken as an unfailing sign that he is on the way to recovery.

Christ has left His own body and blood as the proper food of the soul, under the appearance

My dear brethren, just as God has in His divine Providence prepared food and nourishment for the temporal and natural life of the human body, so has the same good and wonderfully loving God appointed a food for the nourishment and preservation of the spiritual and supernatural life of the immortal soul. What food is that? It is in price and costliness such as the

world with all its riches could not provide, namely, the precious <sup>of bread.</sup> flesh and blood of Jesus Christ, the living Son of God. But how has He prepared this food? Under no other appearance, and mark this well, but that of man's ordinary food, bread and wine. He could as easily have left us His sacred body under the appearance of gold or silver; His almighty power would have found as little difficulty in one as in the other. But what, think you, Christians? If every one who wished to partake of this sacrament were to receive a piece of gold or silver each time, should we require much preaching to induce men to receive it often? Daily, as I believe, would the churches be full of communicants, and one would be obliged to drive off the crowds that would throng to the rails. Ah, the pity of it! So that the appearance of a golden coin has more power to draw the hearts and desires of us mortals than the infinite love of Jesus Christ, who has offered us His body and blood under appearances that are far more adapted to frequent use, the appearances of our ordinary food! It is an evident sign of our stupidity that our appetites and desires are aroused, not by the hidden divine substance and essence, but by the outward glitter of gold.

But suppose that such were the case, who would then provide the matter for this sacrament? I was wrong when I said that then the churches would be full of communicants. That might indeed be the case if there were gold enough to supply them all. No; for I must acknowledge that far fewer would then approach this sacrament, not through want of people who would stretch forth their hands with eager desire for the appearances of gold, but through want of matter, which no one would be willing to supply. So that the love of Jesus Christ has discovered a far better means, inasmuch as He has chosen as the matter of the sacrament the accidents of bread, which is the ordinary food of men all over the world, and is most easily and cheaply supplied. And that there may be no difficulty for all to approach as often as they desire, He has not prescribed that a great piece should be received, but He has hidden His body and blood under a very minute particle of the accidents of bread, to show the eagerness of His wish that we should often enjoy this food of our souls; because as it is prepared with such little trouble, it cannot be decently refused in any Catholic Church to those who desire it.

Moreover, Christ has not fixed any certain day, or appointed a certain town or church for the act of consecration; nor has

By which  
He shows  
His desire  
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ceive Him  
often.

He determined any exact or limited number of priests. In every town, country, and church this divine mystery is kept in order to be distributed. He has so instituted this holy sacrament that the unworthiness of the priest cannot interfere with the validity of the consecration and transubstantiation, nor with the advantage and profit of the person who receives it, although from an unworthy hand. Judas, the traitor, was altogether unworthy, yet he was in the number of those to whom Jesus said: "Do this for a commemoration of Me."<sup>1</sup> And indeed Our Lord made him not only a priest, but a bishop, and that means that Judas too had the power to ordain other priests. We see this clearly from the prophecy of David, which was referred to by St. Peter as being fulfilled in Judas: "His bishopric let another take."<sup>2</sup> Now since Our Lord has made this sacrament so easy, and since He offers it everywhere, He gives us clearly to understand that it is His most eager desire for us to receive it frequently. With unspeakable love He has prepared for us this heavenly bread, and told us that it is our own, for He has taught us to desire it as our bread, and that, too, before He instituted this adorable sacrament. Just as He has taught us to say to God, "Our Father," so He has told us to call this bread our bread, and not only that, but our daily bread: "Give us this day our daily bread." Now, if it is daily bread, it must be eaten often. "Christ is the bread of life," says St. Augustine, "and this bread is ours. And as we say, Our Father, so we say, our bread; because Christ is our bread when we receive Him. And we ask that this bread may be given to us daily."<sup>3</sup>

But this  
food is not  
for the  
wicked.

Now to the subject, my dear brethren. Who are the souls for whom this food is prepared? Mark well that it is bread, and therefore food that is ordained solely for the support of the life of human souls. Away then from this table, all wild beasts, eagles, wolves, swine, dogs, lions, and so forth! The holy table is not prepared for such; that is to say, for those vicious men who, full of pride like eagles, extol themselves above others, and are ashamed of the humble Gospel of Christ and of His public and lowly service; nor for those who hold the maxims and usages of the perverse world as the guide of their actions, who live in

<sup>1</sup> Hoc facite in meam commemorationem.—Luke xxii. 19.

<sup>2</sup> Episcopatum ejus accipiat alter.—Acts i. 20.

<sup>3</sup> Panis vitæ Christus est; et panis hic noster est. Et quomodo dicimus: Pater noster, sic et panem nostrum vocamus; quia Christus, noster qui eum attingimus, panis est.—S. Aug. de Orat. Dom.

pomp and splendor only to appear greater than they really are, as if they were not of the same clay as our forefather Adam. Nor is it prepared for those who hunt only after temporal and perishable goods like greedy wolves, and who by their usury and unjustifiable practices suck the blood of the poor who cannot defend themselves. Nor for those who are given to gluttony and drunkenness, or to carnal pleasures, and who wallow like swine in the filth of vice whenever they find an opportunity. Nor for those who like rabid dogs attack their neighbor with revilings and abusive language, with curses and imprecations, through hatred, envy, anger, ill-temper, or desire of revenge, while with their scandalous and evil tongues they gnaw at their neighbor's reputation like dogs at a bone. Nor for those who are like fierce lions in their homes, and ill-treat in an unchristian manner their wives, children, and domestics. This sacramental and divine food is not for any of these. All men are indeed invited most cordially to partake of it. "Come to Me, all you," says the Giver of the feast; even sinners may come if they have purified themselves from the filth of sin by repentance. But since those others have excluded themselves voluntarily from this table, the words are said to them which the lord spoke in the Gospel of St. Luke: "But I say unto you that none of those men that were invited shall taste of my supper;" and if they presume to intrude themselves with impure consciences, they shall eat eternal death with the food of life.

Who then are they for whom the divine food is prepared? They only who have a pure heart, and whose consciences are free from all mortal sin; therefore they are the chosen children of God, of whom Our Saviour has said: "Blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God" in the kingdom of heaven. Hence this sacramental food is called "heavenly bread," "the bread of angels," "the bread of the children of God." For these too are the oft-repeated promises of Our Lord: "This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that if any man eat of it, he may not die. If any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever. He that eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood abideth in Me and I in him. He that eateth Me, the same also shall live by Me. He that eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood hath everlasting life."

But for the  
pious and  
the chosen  
children of  
God.

<sup>1</sup> Venite ad me omnes.—Matt. xi. 28.

<sup>2</sup> Beati mundo corde, quoniam ipsi Deum videbunt.—Ibid. v. 8.

<sup>3</sup> Hic est panis de coelo descendens, ut si quis ex ipso manducaverit, non moriatur. St

Hence they who seldom receive this food, although they could receive it often, are marked as not being among the elect.

Now, my dear brethren, let each one draw the conclusion for himself, and see to which party he belongs: to the reprobate, or to the chosen children of God. And each one will find this out with certainty if he only sees whether or not this bread of the children of God, this food of the elect tastes agreeably to him; whether he finds an appetite frequently or rarely for the table of the Lord. What then can be the conclusion arrived at by those tepid Christians, who, buried in inveterate habits of vice, or in temporal cares, go to holy Communion once or twice a year, compelled thereto by the express command and threatened punishment of the Church, or influenced by human respect? Alas, what a bad sign for a Christian living in a Catholic country, for whom the table of the Lord stands ready every Sunday and holy-day! Unfortunate Catholics who are forced to live among heretics and infidels, and who seldom have an opportunity of receiving this holy sacrament, you indeed are worthy of pity and can be excused! But in the case of those others, what a sad sign their conduct is, I repeat! For there can be no real health, no true life of a chosen soul, where there is no desire, or relish, or appetite for the food of the elect. It is an evident sign of a soul that is sick unto death to have a disgust for the ordinary bread of the children of God. "We must fear," says St. Cyprian with reason, "and pray, that he who by keeping away is separated from the body of Christ may not also be far removed from salvation," according to the threat of Our Lord: "Amen, amen, I say unto you; except you eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink His blood, you shall not have life in you."<sup>1</sup>

For they have no desire for the bread of life.

But, they say, we eat His flesh once or twice a year; is not that enough? The Catholic Church commands us only to communicate once a year, at Easter-time. Is that the way in which we argue with regard to the other commandments of the Church? She tells us to observe the fast of forty days in Lent, which also occurs but once a year, and to abstain from flesh meat; and yet how many excuses we find whereon to ground a dispensation from this precept! The time during which we have to abstain

*quis manducaverit ex hoc pane, vivet in æternum. Qui manducat meam carnem et bibit meum sanguinem, in me manet et ego in illo. Qui manducat me et ipse vivet propter me. Qui manducat meam carnem et bibit meum sanguinem, habet vitam æternam.*—John vi. 50, 52, 57, 58, 55.

<sup>1</sup> Timendum est et orandum ne dum quis abstiniens separatur a Christi corpore, procul remaneat a salute.

<sup>2</sup> Amen, amen, dico vobis, nisi manducaveritis carnem Filii hominis, et biberitis ejus sanguinem, non habebitis vitam in vobis.—John vi. 54.



from the flesh of animals seems quite too long to us; but we wish to be exact and to measure the time truly in the law that commands us to eat the living flesh of Our Saviour Jesus Christ. How is that? Has the Church then ordered us not to communicate more than once a year? That is not the case. "At least once a year," the law says. She acts like a mother, whose child through illness or delicacy has a distaste to food or wholesome medicine. The mother tries to coax the little one; come, my child, she says; if you do not wish to eat much, try a little bit at least, only one spoonful for my sake! Meanwhile she wishes her child to be strong and healthy, so that it may eat all that is necessary of its own accord as often as it wishes. So does our mother, the Catholic Church, act with her children, when, to her great sorrow and grief, she is obliged to see how most Christians are sick in their souls, and have no desire or appetite for the table of the Lord. Come, she says, my dear children; at least once a year go and feed your souls with the bread of angels! And meanwhile how she sighs and laments, and wishes that the custom of the early Christians were again restored; for they used to communicate every day in the holy Mass. And since her wish cannot be fulfilled on account of the weakening of charity and zeal and the vices of so many godless Christians, how earnestly the Fathers of the Council of Trent admonish and entreat all Christians by the mercy of God, frequently at least, to receive this salutary food! Ah, if the Church had commanded us to eat flesh meat and to drink wine at least once a year, that would suffice to make us eat meat and drink wine every day, and she would not be obliged to admonish, or exhort, or invite us to do it often. Whence this difference? From this: that we have more appetite for the flesh of a slain animal than for the flesh of the Son of God, more appetite for the dead wine that grows out of the earth than for the living blood that flows from the wounds of Jesus Christ. An evident sign, I again repeat, that we have no desire of eternal life, that we do not belong to the children of God. "Behold," says the Prophet David, "they that go far from thee shall perish;"<sup>1</sup> those who remain away from thee a long time shall go to ruin and destruction.

But, on the other hand, what conclusion shall I draw for you, *On the contrary, they* pious Christians, who are wont to communicate and partake of

<sup>1</sup> Ecce qui elongant se a te peribunt.—Ps. lxxii. 27.

who often receive this food with spiritual appetite have a mark of predestination.

this food of the soul at least every fortnight, at the farthest every month, and in many cases every Sunday and holy-day, or even oftener in the week? Oh, be comforted, I say with confidence, you who are elected to heaven, as SS. Peter and Paul called their Christians! Be comforted; you bear about you a sure sign of a healthy soul living in God, since this life-giving food tastes well to you. You are in the number of the children of God, since you have such an appetite for the bread of the children of God. Nor do I alone give you this assurance, but all the holy Fathers, relying on the infallible words of Jesus Christ, agree with me. "How can he die," asks St. Augustine, "whose food is life?"<sup>1</sup> How can he be lost forever who frequently and worthily receives the holy Communion, which, as the holy martyr Ignatius says, "is an antidote to death, and a means of living forever in Jesus Christ"?<sup>2</sup> which, according to St. Lawrence Justinian, "is a well-known sign, and sure forerunner of future happiness"?<sup>3</sup> And so they all say: frequent and worthy communion is a sure sign of predestination to heaven. The reason of this is clear and evident, and we shall understand it when we see the effects of this sacrament in the

### Second Part.

The frequent reception of this food is a sign that one lives holily.

Eternal happiness in the kingdom of heaven is founded on a pious life on earth, for to that alone has Our Lord promised eternal happiness; nor may we without presumption ground our hopes of heaven on anything but the constant observance of all the commandments of God, as we have seen already on a former occasion. Therefore that is the surest sign of a future life in heaven which is the surest sign of a constantly pious life on earth. But among all those signs frequent and worthy communion and reception of the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar is the surest; for since we dare not suspect any one of being so wicked as to approach the table of the Lord with an impure conscience, we must hold it for certain that he who often during the month receives this sacred food, either has a conscience that is always pure, or else he purifies it often, and therefore he spends the greater part of his life in the grace of God; and it is in this that the piety of a Christian consists. Nor can it be otherwise. Here I make exception of witches and sorcerers,

<sup>1</sup> Quomodo moriatur, cui cibis vita est?

<sup>2</sup> Antidotum ne moriamur, sed vivamus semper in Jesu Christo.

<sup>3</sup> Notissimum futuræ felicitatis indicium, ac præsagium certum.

who, driven by the devil, seek to dishonor this holy sacrament by receiving it often; of those wicked priests, who, entangled in the meshes of a secret and unholy passion, yet dare to consecrate daily and to touch with defiled hands and hearts the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ; and of a few hypocrites, who, through a desire of appearing holy, often and without due preparation and unworthily receive the holy Communion; of those vain children of the world, who live according to the maxims of the world, and contrary to the law of God and the Gospel of Christ, and in the state of sin for the most part, and yet do not hesitate to appear often at the table of the Lord; and of those who refuse to abandon the proximate occasion of sin, to restore ill-gotten goods, although they can do so, and to avoid unlawful and scandalous practices. But the Christian who is determined to save his soul, and endeavors to serve God, and of his own accord, without any mere earthly object in view, goes to Communion frequently, he, I say, must spend the greater part of his life in the state of grace, free from mortal sin, since he has that holy custom.

His frequent communions show that he loves God. To sigh and desire one from whom one is absent, to rejoice when he is present, to be anxious to see and speak with him is a property of all who love. On the other hand, says Cassiodorus, to love a good friend, and have the opportunity of enjoying his company, and yet to keep away from him deliberately are two things that do not at all harmonize. Nay, frequent communion, as it were, forces a man to love God and to keep always free from sin. He must have an icicle for a heart who can often approach this fire of divine love and yet not be warmed by it. Who does not know that frequent attendance on and intimacy with a great lord ripens into a friendly confidence, and is a source of many favors from him? What will the soul then not receive and evidently experience which cultivates a frequent intimacy with the great God and King of heaven, who is infinitely rich in graces, infinitely generous, and desirous of bestowing them on the souls that love Him in this sacrament; nay, who are united with Him, and have, as it were, one body, one soul, one life with Him, as He Himself has promised: "He that eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood abideth in Me, and I in him"? And how does He abide in him? Just as one piece of molten wax unites itself with another, says St. Cyril. Just as the leaven is mixed

That he  
loves God,  
and is loved  
by God.

with the whole mass of bread, says Nyssen. Just as the drop of water is mixed with the wine, says Paschasius. Just as the glowing iron is, as it were, one and the same thing with the fire, says St. John Damascene. Just as the plant grafted on a tree, nourished and moistened by its sap, becomes united to the whole stem, and brings forth fruit, says St. Thomas. Just as a man's arm, united with the head makes one body with it, says St. Paul. How beautiful these similes of those holy doctors to explain the degree of intimacy that exists between the frequent communicant and Jesus Christ, the supreme Good! What copious graces, I repeat, will not a pious soul, thus united with God, receive from Him!

That reception enriches his soul, and gains heaven for him.

It cannot be otherwise. For the other sacraments are intended only for partial effects in the sanctification of the soul; for instance, by Baptism original sin is taken away, and the soul receives its first grace; by Confirmation we are strengthened to confess the true faith without shame; by Penance the sins committed after Baptism are taken away, and grace is given to the penitent by which in future he may more easily conquer temptations to sin; by Extreme Unction the soul is encouraged and helped to overcome the devil in the last agony; by Holy Orders priests receive grace to perform the duties of their sacred office becomingly; by Matrimony the husband and wife receive grace to do their duty properly. The Sacrament of the Altar is the only one that sets no limit or bounds to the graces it gives; all that is divided into parts in the other sacraments is united in this; for it is the Author and Dispenser of graces, the infinite God Himself, who is received in this holy sacrament.

Shown by a simile.

When a prince goes with his retinue through the public streets to church, he is wont to give money to his lackeys to be distributed to the poor in his name; and what occurs? Oh, exclaim the poor people, this is to be a princely alms; now we may expect something good! I must run at once and not be late. And they would be right if it were not the lackey who had to give the alms; as it is, nothing but coppers are thrown to them one by one, so that each beggar may have something. But if the prince himself puts his hand into the purse and distributes the alms, then indeed something better than coppers may be looked for; gold pieces are the least that can become the magnificence of a prince on such an occasion. My dear brethren, the other holy sacraments are, so to speak, only lackeys and servants of

Christ, only dead signs to which He has given His grace to be distributed little by little to the souls that receive them. In the Most Holy Sacrament of the Altar the great King of heaven comes in His own august Person to the human soul, and gives Himself to it completely. What treasures of grace will He not then leave behind? And how rich that soul will become in time to whom this Monarch pays a visit every month, every fortnight, or often during the week? How can sin be habitual where holiness itself finds its customary dwelling and shelter? "The Eucharist," St. Crispin does not hesitate to say, "makes an earthly man heavenly,"<sup>1</sup> so to speak, godly or divine, when frequently received.

Experience proves this. When the early Christians assembled for the breaking of bread, that is, to receive daily the holy Communion, oh, what an edifying, chaste, holy, and humble life they led! Their behavior alone was a sermon in itself, eloquent enough to convince the infidels of their errors and put them to shame. But later on, the world had a contrary experience as this holy custom began to die out among Christians; for the fervor of spirit, the fire of the love of God, and with it holiness, grew cold, and in the place of them appeared many heathenish, unchristian customs, along with an unrestrained, dissolute mode of life. Father Paul Barry of the Society of Jesus tells us the following tale of a citizen: this man had during his youth suffered the most violent temptations to carnal lust; so importunate were they that he often consented to them, so that he was leading an impure life. Nevertheless, he still felt a great wish to save his soul, and a great fear of eternal damnation; and he fled for help to his confessor, whose advice he asked, begging at the same time that he would suggest some means of freeing himself from the unfortunate habits he had acquired, and from the sinful life that he was leading in consequence. I have no better advice to give you, said the priest, than to marry, and observe conjugal chastity. The man obeyed, took to himself a wife, and at once experienced peace and repose of conscience. But some years after his wife died, and behold, the same temptations returned, and he committed more sin even than before. Tormented by remorse, he went to a pious priest, a member of a religious order, to seek from him some good medicine for his disease. The priest gave him far different advice to what he had

By experience and examples.

<sup>1</sup> *Eucharistia ex terreno facit coelestem.*

received on the first occasion. Sir, said he, if you take my advice, you will go to holy Communion frequently, at least once a week, and you will soon be freed from those temptations, and no virtue will be dearer to you than holy purity. The man obeyed, and after some time, during which he used the means prescribed, he found himself so free from those abominable temptations that he could scarcely contain himself for joy, and often sighed in deep regret: ah, why did I marry? Why did I not in my youth find that man to tell me to communicate often? Ah, would to God that I had had a confessor to prescribe such a salutary medicine for me; then I should not have led such a shameful life, and should have been like an angel in purity! Two pious students, speaking on one occasion about death, one promised the other that if God permitted him, he would appear to him on his departure from this world, and let him know how he fared in eternity. After a short time he died, and on the seventeenth day after appeared in visible shape to his friend, surrounded by a brilliant light, and when the other asked him about his state, replied: Through the mercy of God I am happy, and am now enjoying the bliss of heaven. The other congratulated him most heartily, and said: What was it that pleased God most on earth of all your actions by which you have now attained such a degree of glory? This, answered the blessed soul, that I communicated often, and always with the utmost devotion and purity of heart. He then vanished, and left his friend filled with consolation and the firm determination of following his example. Would to God that all felt the same zeal, and endeavored by the frequent reception of this sacrament to obtain copious graces from God, and to amass rich treasures of glory in heaven!

Hence the devil tries to keep men from Communion.

The crafty tempter is well aware of this effect of the holy Communion, and therefore he strains every nerve to prevent people, as far as he can, from receiving this holy sacrament often, as the illustrious Thomas à Kempis says: "The enemy, knowing the fruit to be derived from the holy Communion, and the salutary effects of it, spares no effort to keep the faithful and devout away from it as much as possible."<sup>1</sup> What obstacles does he not invent to put in the way of pious souls! What empty pretexts and groundless reasons does he not bring forward to hide

<sup>1</sup> Inimicus sciens fructum et remedium maximum, in sacra Communionem positum, omni modo et occasione nititur fideles et devotos quantum praevalet retrahere et impedire.—Imit. L. iv. c. 10.

his malicious plans! Some he inspires with a doubt regarding the faith; others he causes to omit holy Communion from a mistaken idea of reverence and respect; others he tries to persuade that they will derive more fruit if they remain away longer in order to prepare better. Sometimes he appeals to the example of those who seem to be good Christians, although they do not communicate frequently; or he suggests the thought: what will people say or think if I go to Communion so often? or he tries to overwhelm one with an excessive care of temporal things, so that it seems impossible to prepare duly for the reception of this holy sacrament; or he fomented envy, hatred, and quarreling; or upsets the mind with all sorts of doubts and anxieties of conscience, so that people imagine they dare not go to Communion. Many he plagues with a dryness and insipidity of heart, so that they find no desire or relish of the holy Communion; he takes from them all wish for this heavenly food; it seems to them as tasteless as dry straw; and thus he endeavors to keep them from the table of the Lord. What is the reason of all this? What does he gain by it? His intention therein is like that of a certain people who live close to the frontiers of Abyssinia; these barbarians wait till the Abyssinians are extenuated with a forty days' fast, and then fall upon them and take them prisoners. So also the devil, when he has succeeded in making a soul suffer hunger through long abstinence from the bread of life, attacks it with his temptations, and on account of the loss of graces and of strength he has then little trouble in leading it into sin, and subjecting it to his tyranny.

And, generally, it is those who seldom go to holy Communion who live according to the vain world, gratify their carnal appetites, or are quite buried in temporal things: "Behold they that go far from thee shall perish." Of their own accord they exclude themselves from the heavenly supper, they deprive themselves of this divine food, and thus lose those copious graces and helps that they might otherwise have expected! Therefore dost Thou threaten them with eternal ruin, and that shall be their greatest punishment: "But I say unto you that none of those men that were invited shall taste of My supper." When the city of Samaria was suffering from a grievous famine, and the Prophet Eliseus had foretold a great plenty of food for the following day, one of the servants of the king laughed at him and derided him as a false prophet. Eliseus answered him: "Thou shalt see

They who allow themselves to be deceived herein, and seldom go to Communion, cannot hope for heaven.

it with thy eyes, but shalt not eat thereof.”<sup>1</sup> Such is the chastisement of those who do not accept the invitation of Our Lord, but remain away for a long time from His table. Unhappy man! I might say to such a one; since you do not believe in the wonderful effects of this sacrament, and refuse to come to receive it, you will indeed behold the abundance of this divine food, “but you will not eat thereof,” you will see it raised in the hands of the priest during holy Mass, but you will not eat thereof; you will see a great number of people fed with it on Sundays and holidays, but you will not eat thereof, and your soul will suffer hunger and die forever, because you wilfully deprive yourself of this salutary sacrament.

While they  
who keep  
others away  
must fear  
punish-  
ment.

Wo, then, to him who by ridicule, or abuse, or any other means, tries to keep others from frequent Communion! A certain nun once showed some displeasure at some of her sisters who were in the habit of communicating often. As St. Gertrude was praying for her, she heard Our Lord saying to her: Daughter, it is my delight to be with the children of men; so that if any one tries by words or otherwise to prevent from receiving My sacred body in the holy Communion one who is not in mortal sin, he acts against Me, and deprives Me of My joy and pleasure. The Almighty has shown, too, by sudden and sharp punishments, how displeasing this is to Him. The superioress of the convent in which St. Ludgard was looked with suspicion on that saint because she used to go so often to holy Communion, and therefore forbade her to receive so frequently. The saint, ready as ever to obey, answered her: as far as I am concerned I will do what you tell me; yet I doubt not that My Spouse, Jesus Christ, will take vengeance on your body. And such was really the case. Ludgard remained away from the table of the Lord, but from that moment the superioress was attacked by such violent pains that she had to take to her bed and could not stir a step out of her cell; nor was she freed from her illness and the pains it caused until she acknowledged her fault, and gave Ludgard, as before, full leave to receive holy Communion as often as she pleased. Amongst those who ridiculed St. Catherine of Siena on account of frequent Communion, there was a woman who on entering her house was attacked on the spot by a mortal illness, and died without the sacraments, while another became suddenly raving mad. Listen to this, unchristian parents and husbands,

<sup>1</sup> Videbis oculos tuis, et inde non comedes.—IV. Kings vii. 2.



who, instead of encouraging your children and wives to devotion and the fear of God, forbid them to go often to holy Communion, lest they should become too pious! Thus many pious girls and women are obliged to come secretly, as it were, to beg for the holy Communion, so as to escape the notice of husband or father; they are compelled to act like the peahen that lays its eggs in secret places lest other birds should break them. Wo, I repeat to all those who, if they are not pious themselves but suffer hunger in their souls, cannot endure that others should enjoy the bread of life!

No, my dearest Saviour; far be it from me ever to keep any one from Thy holy table, and much less to absent myself from it! I often complain that I am so inconstant in my good resolutions, so weak and frail in temptations, so cold and tepid in Thy love; if there were no other reason, this very misery of mine should urge and force me to seek strength at Thy holy table, and warmth at Thy divine fire. I wish, desire, and hope one day to sit at that table in Thy heavenly kingdom, at which Thou hast promised to attend Thyself on Thy chosen children; why then should I remain long away from thy table on earth, when I can have the great honor of receiving Thee as a sure pledge of my future happiness as often as I wish, and my confessor permits? Thou desirest and dost earnestly request of me to come to Thee that Thou mayest help, console, and delight me. Therefore I cannot and will not refuse this proffered grace, but come to Thee often. Let men think and say of me what they will; let them ridicule me as a devotee, and ask me: why do you go to holy Communion so often? I will give them the answer taught me by St. Francis de Sales: "If," he says, "worldlings ask you why you receive so often, tell them it is to learn to love God, to purify your soul from imperfections, to free yourself from your miseries, to find consolation in your afflictions, and strength in your infirmities. Tell them," continues the holy man (pay attention to this!)—"tell them that two kinds of men should communicate frequently; the perfect, because as they are in good dispositions they would act ill in not going to the fount and source of perfection; the imperfect, that they may easily learn perfection; the strong, that they may not grow tired; the weak, that they may gain strength; the sick, that they may recover health; the healthy, that they may not become sick." I will answer them: I hope to be one of Thy chosen children, O God!

Conclusion  
and purpose  
often to re-  
ceive  
worthily.

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therefore I wish, with Thy grace, so to live that I may often be admitted to the table of Thy children; and no words of men, no suggestion of the devil, no disturbance or trouble of my own mind shall keep me away; so that according to Thy promise I may continue to live in Thee, and Thou in me, until I shall come to live with Thee forever in the kingdom of heaven. Amen.

*Another introduction to the same sermon for the second Sunday after Pentecost.*

**Text.**

*Cæperunt simul omnes excusare.*—Luke xiv. 18.  
“And they began all at once to make excuse.”

**Introduction.**

What ignorant, discourteous people they were! Why did they not at least for an hour leave the farm in the country, the oxen in the stable, the wife sitting at the fire, and come to the great wedding-feast to which they were invited? No; “They began all at once to make excuse.” They said: we cannot come. There, my dear brethren, you have an example of our want of courtesy. Jesus Christ, Our Saviour, has prepared a great supper for us in the holy Communion; we are all invited to it, not once, but often; but how many excuses do we not find, etc. *Continues as above.*

*For the same subject, see the preceding fourth part.*

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**SEVENTY-THIRD SERMON.**

**ON THE USE OF ADVERSITY ON THE ROAD TO HEAVEN.**

**Subject.**

God is with us in adversity, and ordains it for us; He promises His eternal kingdom of heaven as a reward for it; therefore it must be good and profitable.—*Preached on the feast of St. Andrew, apostle.*

**Text.**

*O bona cruz!*—Words of St. Andrew, apostle.  
“O good cross!”

### Introduction.

Is it then a good thing, O great St. Andrew! to be nailed to a cross, and to die thereon in the utmost agony? Tell us what good thou hast found in the cross, that thou wert so eager and desirous of it, and didst embrace it as a long sought-for treasure? Oh, so it seems to me he will answer, this cross has been ordained for me by Christ, my dear Master, who for love of me died on a cross; He ordained it for me when He called me to follow Him; He sees that I am suspended on it; it is by this cross that I must come to my Master, who is awaiting me in the joys of heaven. Have I not then reason to rejoice that the cross is at last prepared for me? Truly, O good cross! long wished-for, sought without intermission, and at length prepared in answer to my eager wish, "receive me from among men, and restore me to my Master!" My dear brethren, what it means to endure crosses and trials we all know in these troublous times. Wars and the miseries that ensue from them; losses or want of temporal goods, and the poverty caused thereby, along with secret destitution, terrible and dangerous epidemics and deaths, and the pains of the body suffered by the sick, as well as the mental anguish endured by those who have lost dear friends,—these are crosses and trials which now afflict us. And how will it be with us later on? Wherever we go, we hear weeping, sighs, lamentations, complaints, cries of despondency, and despair almost in some cases. But, dear Christians, no more of those complaints and cries of despair! Let us only keep God as our Friend, and with St. Andrew look up to heaven, and contemplate the joys that are prepared for us after we have borne the cross; then we shall find true comfort, and look on the cross as the greatest blessing, as I shall now prove in detail, and I say:

### Plan of Discourse.

*God is with us in adversity; He Himself ordains it for us as a reward for enduring it He promises us His eternal kingdom of heaven; therefore the cross cannot and must not be injurious, but rather most beneficial and advantageous to us; therefore we should bear it rather with consolation than with despondency and despair. Such is the whole subject of this sermon.*

Do Thou, O dear Saviour! by the intercession of Mary and of our holy guardian angels, give us Thy light and grace to

know this truth, so that in future we may bear all the trials that are in store for us with patience and contentment, and after having carried the cross may arrive at that place, the thought of which filled Thy apostle Andrew with joy; then with him we shall think and say in adversity: "O good cross!"

God sees  
our trials  
and ordains  
them for us.

The chief foundation of my subject, namely, that God sees us, no matter what is the trial that oppresses and torments us, that it is He Himself who sends us the cross, I will assume as granted, in order not to lose time. For the faith teaches that God is present everywhere; that is required by His divine perfections; and this is the case in all the circumstances and events of our lives, but especially in the time of trial and adversity. "The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a contrite heart,"<sup>1</sup> says the Prophet David; and God Himself assures us "I am with him in his trouble."<sup>2</sup> We know also infallibly by our faith, and God's infinite providence requires it, that nothing in the world happens without His ordination and will; nay, that without His knowledge and consent not a hair of our heads can be injured. Read the Holy Scriptures; ask the Lord who is the first cause of death and of all misfortune. He will answer you: "I will kill, and I will make to live; I will strike, and I will heal."<sup>3</sup> Sickness and health, poverty and riches, death and life, are in My hands. Ask the Prophet Amos whence adversity comes. He will answer you: "Shall there be evil in a city which the Lord hath not done?"<sup>4</sup> Can there be found in the whole city, under so many roofs, in so many rooms and corners, in so many hearts and minds, any evil or suffering, hunger or care, sorrow or desolation, of which God is not the cause? Not a single one; whether the evil itself comes from heaven or from hell, from friend or foe, from good or from wicked men: it does not happen without the ordination of the Lord. Ask King David what was the cause of his being publicly stoned and mocked by Semei. He will tell you: "The Lord hath bid him curse David; and who is he that shall dare say, why hath He done so?"<sup>5</sup> Ask Job who made him so poor, who slew his children, who ravaged his lands, who struck him from the crown of his head to the sole of

<sup>1</sup> *Juxta est Dominus illis qui tribulato sunt corde.*—Ps. xxxiii. 19.

<sup>2</sup> *Cum ipso sum in tribulatione.*—Ibid. xc. 15.

<sup>3</sup> *Ego occidam, et ego vivere faciam; percutiam, et ego sanabo.*—Deut. xxxii. 39.

<sup>4</sup> *Si erit malum in civitate, quod Dominus non fecerit?*—Amos iii. 6.

<sup>5</sup> *Dominus præcepit ei, ut malediceret David; et quis est qui audeat dicere, quare sic fecerit?*—II. Kings xvi. 10.

his foot with a grievous ulcer. He will not blame the Sabeans, the Chaldeans, the violent storm, nor even the devil himself, but with contented heart he will answer: "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; as it hath pleased the Lord, so is it done; blessed be the name of the Lord."<sup>1</sup> Ask Christ Himself, Our Lord, who filled up for Him the bitter chalice of His sufferings. He will not refer to Judas who betrayed Him with a kiss, nor to Pilate who condemned Him to death, nor to the Jews and executioners who nailed Him to the cross; but He will attribute it all to His heavenly Father, and say what He said in the garden when Peter drew his sword to save Him from the hands of His enemies: "Put up thy sword into the scabbard. The chalice which My Father hath given Me, shall I not drink it?"<sup>2</sup> Therefore it is and must be true that every evil, no matter what its name may be, sin alone excepted, comes from God as from its first cause, and that the same God has ordained crosses and trials for every one.

Having laid this foundation, I proceed. Oh, is that really the case? Is God with us when we are visited with trials and afflictions? Does He look down on us to see how and what we are suffering? Yes, for our sufferings and crosses come from no other than Himself. In that case then I require no further proof that it cannot be at all injurious, but rather best and most advantageous for us to be afflicted; and hence we should rather rejoice in adversity than be cast down or despondent. If the devil plagued, or could plague us without the knowledge of the Almighty; if men could persecute us irrespective of the divine decrees; if the air, the wind, thunder, fire, or water could cause injury and bring misfortune, poverty, or sickness by chance, without the will or decree of God, then I should have to confess that adversity is not useful to us, and that it would be better to be free from such trials. But now as all this comes from God, from such a just, merciful, loving, and kindly hand, then it must be that all trials are good and useful.

For tell me this: could that God, whose kindness and mercy have neither end nor limit, whose goodness and generosity are an inexhaustible treasure, who has created for us the unspeakable joys of His kingdom of heaven, who loves us far more tenderly

<sup>1</sup> Dominus dedit, Dominus abstulit; sicut Domino placuit, ita factum est; sit nomen Domini benedictum.—Job i. 21.

<sup>2</sup> Mitte gladium tuum in vaginam. Calicem quem dedit mihi Pater, non bibam illum?—John xviii. 11.

Hence they  
must be  
good for us.

Otherwise  
the good  
God would  
not send  
them to us.

than a father his child, who looks so carefully after us, and especially after the just who wish to serve Him: could that God, I ask, trouble, afflict, and torment us, if He knew that it was not for our good? "No," says St. Gregory, "the God who created man in His goodness never permits him to be tried unjustly."<sup>1</sup> And what reason could He have for afflicting us with trials if they were not for our good? Otherwise He would have pleasure and delight in our sufferings; like the tyrant who, having heard a poor man shrieking loudly under torture, commanded him to be tortured as long as possible that he might have the pleasure of hearing his cries of anguish. O blasphemous thought to be entertained of an all-merciful God! Far different should be our opinion of that Lord who, to save us from eternal torments, did not spare even His only-begotten and most beloved Son, but delivered Him up for our sake to a most violent and painful death.

Nor Christ  
who pities  
our mis-  
eries.

Again, how could it be possible for Jesus Christ, Our Saviour, who through sheer love for us men was born in a stable, spent three and thirty years in the utmost poverty, shed every drop of His blood, and allowed Himself to be most cruelly done to death on the gibbet of the cross that we might be freed from the punishment due to us in hell forever, or in purgatory for a time: how could He, I ask, look on while His brethren and dear children (for so He calls us) are daily and hourly tried by manifold sufferings, nay, how could He Himself be the cause of these sufferings if they were not good and salutary for us? For, as St. Paul says, He cannot behold our misery and wretchedness, in spite of the advantage we may derive from it, without feeling pity for us: "For we have not a high-priest who cannot have compassion on our infirmities."<sup>2</sup> Nay, as He is our Head, and we are His members, He suffers with us, so to speak, and feels all that hurts us. "There is no doubt," says St. Ambrose, "that in the martyrs Christ is slain, and in those who suffer Christ suffers too."<sup>3</sup> If we are obliged to look on while one whom we love is suffering, we feel it as a deep wound, and sometimes what we see causes us more pain at heart than that which the other really feels. The loving and compassionate heart of Jesus shows

<sup>1</sup> Qui benigne hominem condidit, nequaquam injuste cruciari permittit.—S. Greg. in Moral.

<sup>2</sup> Non enim habemus pontificem, qui non possit compati infirmitatibus nostris.—Heb. iv. 15.

<sup>3</sup> Dubium non est, quin in martyribus occidetur Christus, et in his qui patiuntur, eadem patiatur et Christus.—S. Amb. in Ep. 2. ad Cor.

itself plainly enough in those sighs with which He bewailed the state of the poor people in the desert who, while following Him, had to be without food for three days: "I have compassion on the multitude: for behold they have now been with Me three days, and have nothing to eat; and if I shall send them away fasting to their home, they will faint in the way."<sup>1</sup> Poor people! I must help them even if it costs Me a miracle. It is shown by His pity for the widow of Naim, who had lost her only son by death. "Whom when the Lord had seen," says St. Luke, "being moved with mercy towards her, He said to her: Weep not;"<sup>2</sup> and at once He restored the dead man to life, and gave him back to her. It is shown by the tears of compassion He shed at the grave of Lazarus when his sisters Martha and Magdalene were overwhelmed with sorrow: "Jesus, therefore, when He saw her weeping, and the Jews that were come with her weeping, groaned in the spirit, and troubled Himself."<sup>3</sup>

And is this compassionate and loving Saviour, who, as it were, feels in Himself our sufferings—is He to look on and see us oppressed and groaning under the heavy weight of the cross, if it were not useful for us to be so oppressed? Who can believe that? "Could not He," said the Jews to one another, when they saw Him weeping at the grave of Lazarus, "that opened the eyes of the man born blind have caused that this man should not die?"<sup>4</sup> If He loved Lazarus as much as He seemed to show by His manner, why did He allow him to die? If He was able to restore sight to the man born blind, could He not have healed His friend of the sickness he was suffering from, and so preserve his life? So may we too say. Is the Almighty God, who arranges all things according to His own good will and pleasure, unable to avert from us the sad accidents that sometimes befall us? Is it not He who makes the rain and hail in the clouds, who releases the winds from their barriers and again shuts them up therein? Could He not then have prevented that fire, the destruction of our property by the weather, and the want, hunger, and poverty consequent thereon? Is He not able to make all things out of nothing? and could He not have saved me from

He could easily take the cross from us.

<sup>1</sup> Misereor super turbam; quia ecce jam triduo sustinent me, nec habent quod manducant; et si dimiserio eos jejunos in domum suam, deficient in via.—Mark viii. 2, 3.

<sup>2</sup> Quam cum vidisset Dominus, misericordia motus super eam, dixit illi: noli flere.—Luke vii. 13.

<sup>3</sup> Jesus ergo ut vidit eam plorantem, et Judæos qui venerant cum ea plorantes, in fremuit spiritu et turbavit seipsum.—John xi. 33.

<sup>4</sup> Non poterat hic, qui aperuit oculos cæci nati, facere ut hic non moreretur?—Ibid. 37.

this illness, or my dear friend from an untimely death? Does He not hold the hearts of men in His hands, and move and direct them as He pleases? Could He not then have hindered the malice of this wicked, unjust, unruly man, who is now persecuting, oppressing, tormenting, and annoying me? Is it not He, in a word, who is the Lord and Master of all? Can He not then free me from this cross and grievous trial that now weighs so heavily on me? Yes, my good people! He is indeed that Lord; He might have prevented all these misfortunes, and can still do so at any moment.

And would  
not allow us  
to suffer if  
it were not  
good for us.  
Shown by a  
smile.

Why has He not done it then? Why does He not now do it? Why does He allow us to remain in our wretchedness, and to sink into it deeper and deeper? Does He not hear our cries and complaints, our prayers and entreaties? Truly, He hears them all; He is with you, and sees your misery. But He says He loves us so much; that He has great pity for us; and yet He Himself places us in this wretched state? Is that the way to show love, torturing and punishing us? My dear brethren, do you not see that there is a mystery concealed under all this? Adversity must be good for us, and it cannot be otherwise; or else the decrees of Divine Providence would contradict one another; God would love and hate us at the same time; for then He would either betray us by a false show of compassion, or He would be wanting in the power to help us. Imagine, my dear brethren, that you see a tender and beautiful little child in the arms of its mother; it is suffering from an ulcer that eats away the flesh; the surgeon comes and, taking a lancet, cuts into the child's flesh and takes out the ulcer from the very bone. Oh, what a painful and horrible sight! The child weeps and shrieks in pain, the mother's tears flow not less copiously; she tries all sorts of caresses to quiet her dear son; she mingles her tears with his. But meanwhile she allows the operation to go on; nay, she holds the child fast in her arms that it may not stir, and commands and encourages the surgeon to go bravely to work. You are in the room while this is going on, and see it all; what do you think of it? If you were to decide merely from what you see without consulting your reason, you would say to yourself: What a foolish woman that is! She cries and weeps at the sufferings of her son, and yet does nothing to hinder them, nay, even encourages the surgeon to add to the child's torment. Is that motherly love, to allow her son to be flayed alive in that manner? But such



are not your thoughts on the matter; you rather say: that painful operation is good and necessary for the little one; otherwise the mother would not help in it; she would rather drive away the cruel surgeon by violence, and fasten her teeth in his hand, than allow him so to torture her child.

O poor, sorrowful, desolate soul! tried by many crosses! As He sees us suffering without freeing us, it must be good for us to suffer.  
 You are now under the pressure of adversity, of poverty, pain, persecution, humiliations, as if you were in the hands of a cruel executioner; you moan, and lament, and weep, and complain that your lot is so hard, that you are treated unjustly, that your good name is taken away by calumny, that you are robbed of your goods, oppressed, straitened on all sides, that you have to suffer from secret want that you dare not even make known; all this is painful, I confess; it is a hard, afflicting, trying cure for you; but, dear Christian, be of good heart! Look back a little with the eyes of faith! Your God, your Saviour (oh, truly, a far sweeter name than that of mother!), He who loves you more than you can love your own child, as He says Himself: "Can a woman forget her infant, so as not to have pity on the son of her womb? and if she should forget, yet will not I forget thee;"<sup>1</sup> your Saviour, who bears you in His hands, and never loses sight of you, as He says in the same place: "Behold, I have graven thee in My hands; thy walls are always before My eyes;"<sup>2</sup> your Saviour, who carries you in His lap, in His heart, who says so expressly that he who touches you touches the apple of His eye: "He that toucheth you toucheth the apple of My eye;"<sup>3</sup> your Saviour, I say, sees your suffering; He is the instrument of your trial; He knows and understands well what you have to endure in this sickness, this contempt, this poverty and want; He has a heartfelt pity for you, and yet He allows what He could so easily prevent; He urges on the misfortune that torments you. Be satisfied then! How can you doubt that your suffering is for the greater good of your soul? Know that while it seems cruel, it is in reality a proof of the true love and affection of your God for you.

Curtius writes that while Alexander the Great lay sick in bed he was warned by one of his trustiest councillors to be on his guard against his physician Philip, whom King Darius had

Hence we should bear the cross willingly, as a benefit.

<sup>1</sup> Numquid oblivisci potest mulier infantem suum, ut non misereatur filioliteri sui? et si illa oblita fuerit, ego tamen non obliviscar tui.—Is. xlix. 15.

<sup>2</sup> Ecce in manibus meis descripsi te; muri tui coram oculis meis semper.—Ibid. 16.

<sup>3</sup> Qui tetigerit vos, tangit pupillam oculi mei.—Zach. ii. 8.

bribed to poison Alexander. When the latter had read the letter conveying this warning, the physician appeared with the medicine; Alexander quite coolly gave him the letter; read that, said he, and at once took the medicine from him and drank it off. Ah, Christians, if he had such confidence in the faithfulness of his physician that he looked on it as impossible that a medicine prepared by him for the restoration of his master's health could contain anything poisonous or injurious, how could we imagine that in the medicine given us by God Himself, our most faithful, kind, and loving Father, there can be anything hurtful? No; that is impossible. Whatever comes from such a tender hand must be for our good. So it is, my dear brethren. This one consideration is to my mind as good as a hundred proofs. If the Holy Ghost had not so often and expressly called blessed those who suffer persecution here; those who weep and mourn; those who endure hunger and thirst, want and poverty; if the Holy Scriptures had not spoken so frequently of the advantage of trials and crosses; if we had not been told by the holy Fathers and Doctors of the Church that suffering is a true sign of the elect children of God, I would still believe and maintain and uphold that trials are good and salutary for all men, especially for the just; and I am convinced of that by the sole fact that the God who loves us so much, and who punishes no one wantonly, is with me, sees what I suffer, and ordains and decrees it for me, and although He might easily free me from it, does not do so. And this one thought should be a source of consolation to us in all our troubles, no matter how great they may be; such is the conclusion arrived at by St. Chrysostom after having proved that nothing occurs without the will and ordination of God, and how He loves us more than parents love their children: "You need not," he says, "continue your investigations any farther; this one fact should be enough for your consolation."<sup>1</sup> This was enough to comfort and encourage David in the midst of his manifold troubles and the persecutions he had to suffer: "Though I should walk in the midst of the shadow of death, I will fear no evils." Why? "For Thou art with me."<sup>2</sup> Thou, O Lord! seest me, and dost not deliver me from those trials; Thou permittest them, and they are according to Thy will! Withdraw, then, more and more from my eyes; hide Thyself in a dark cloud; leave me

<sup>1</sup> Nihil igitur ultra pervestigas; etenim ad consolationem hæc sufficiunt.

<sup>2</sup> Et æambulavero in medio umbræ mortis, non timebo mala; quoniam tu mecum es.—Ps. xxii. 4.

without all human consolation: "I will fear no evils, for Thou art with me;" I know that while I am bearing the cross Thou art with me by Thy grace and favor. And for that reason I will not allow my heart to sink under the weight of trouble, but rather, since the trouble comes from Thy hand, seek comfort in it: "Thy rod and Thy staff, they have comforted me."

And truly, if we saw what God sees, if we were permitted to look into the decrees and arrangements of Divine Providence; if we knew the fortunate result that is to follow from the trouble we now suffer, we should certainly seek most eagerly, desire most intensely, and embrace with both arms the evil we now fear and try to shun. Joseph, as the Scripture tells us, was robbed of his clothes by his wicked brethren, thrown into a pit, and then brought out and sold to the Ishmaelites. In what a sad state the poor youth then was! What copious and bitter tears he shed! How often he fell on his knees and begged his brothers to spare him! How many sighs he sent forth to heaven for God to save him and not separate him from his dear father, or allow him to be sent as a slave into a distant land. Poor Joseph! thy condition then was a deplorable one! Alas! to be carried away so far from home, father, and country! But what little love God would have shown thee if He had heard thy sighs! And how different thy own wishes would have been hadst thou known the honor and good fortune that were to come to thee through thy very misery! Go then with a good heart where Divine Providence sends thee. If thou hadst not been thus tried, persecuted, and sold as a slave, thou hadst not attained to the purple and crown; thou wouldst not have been viceroy of Egypt, and thy father, thy brothers, thy whole family, and many other people as well, might have perished of hunger. The result showed this, my dear brethren; for by this rugged way God brought him to the throne of Egypt; by this outward and apparent misery he was raised to a high dignity, and became the saviour of many nations.

O you who are now unfortunate according to the judgment of the world! you who must daily bewail in secret your unhappy lot with sighs and tears: if you only knew how great is the fortune and happiness prepared for you by Divine Providence as a reward for what you now suffer, you would at once dry up your tears, and change your lamentations into joy and gladness! You

Generally speaking, we look on the cross as an evil, because we do not see the good it does.

If we knew better we should not complain.

<sup>1</sup> *Virga tua et baculus tuus; ipsa me consolata sunt.*—Ps. xlii. 4.

think to yourselves: what good can I draw from this tedious illness, this bodily pain, this mental trouble and sorrow, that interferes with my ordinary devotions? Would it not be better for me to be in good health? What good can I derive from the loss of my property, from this poverty and want that is almost driving me to despair? Would it not be better for me to be able to live decently, according to my state in life, and thus be freer to serve God? What advantage have I to hope from this public disgrace, this unjust calumny, this persecution that takes away all heart and courage from me? Would it not be better for me to keep my good name before the world? What good is it to me that my husband is taken from me by a premature death, leaving me destitute, and in such a state that life is a burden to me? What good is it to me that my father, or mother, or only child, or dearest friend is taken from this world, and thus I am deprived of my only comfort? Would it not be better if they had remained alive? for then I should be more at liberty to serve God. Yes! according to your ideas, that would be better for your temporal consolation; but in the judgment of the almighty God, and for the good of your soul here as well as hereafter, it would not be better or more advantageous. I will not now enter into detailed explanation of the many advantages and fruits that are to be derived from the trials that God sends us, namely: how by them He turns our hearts away from sin, from evil inclinations, from the world and its vanities, and inspires us with the love of heavenly goods; how He thus proves our virtue, adds to our merit, promotes His own honor, etc., for all that has been explained before. I will confine myself to-day solely to the consideration of the crown of honor, far more splendid than that which fell to the lot of Joseph in Egypt, that God has prepared as a reward for your short-lived sorrow.

Short-lived  
trials shall  
be followed  
by eternal  
joys.

Raise your eyes to that place to which St. Andrew ascended on this day from his cross, where St. John, as he tells us in the Apocalypse, saw a vast multitude of people; and where to the question: "These that are clothed in white robes, who are they? and whence came they?" he heard the answer: "These are they who are come out of great tribulation. Therefore they are before the throne of God. They shall no more hunger nor thirst, . . . and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes;"<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Hi qui amicti sunt stolis albis, qui sunt? et unde venerunt? Hi sunt qui venerunt de tribulatione magna. Ideo sunt ante thronum Dei. Non esurient neque sitient amplius, . . . et absterget Deus omnem lachrymam ab oculis eorum. — Apoc. vii. 13-17.

the place of which Our Lord says to you and to all who are afflicted: "Be glad and rejoice, for your reward is very great in heaven."<sup>1</sup> That place is heaven, to which and to its indescribable joys God has determined to bring you by the rugged way of the cross; it is heaven for which by the divine decrees your trials and sufferings must fit you. Hear St. Paul: "For that which is at present momentary and light of our tribulation, worketh for us above measure exceedingly an eternal weight of glory;"<sup>2</sup> and again: "Through many tribulations we must enter into the kingdom of God."<sup>3</sup> This painful illness shall be followed by eternal delights; this poverty and hunger by priceless treasures and eternal happiness; this disgrace and oppression by a throne of honor that is even now ready; this death, sorrow, desolation, by everlasting joy and life without end! "Thus," says St. Chrysostom, "God casts down His friends that He may afterwards exalt them; He so pierces them with thorns that He may crown them with roses."<sup>4</sup> This reward would not be for you if you were not thus tried on earth, for no one can follow Christ in His ascent into heaven, who has not first followed Him in suffering and bearing the cross on earth. If any man will come after Me, He says to all, let him take up his cross. Consider the place from which He left this world, and went up into His glory and majesty; is it not the same mount of Olives where He endured the bloody sweat of his death-agony? By this He gives us to understand that heaven must be gained by crosses and sufferings. As Hugo says: "Tribulation is sent to us as a most acceptable messenger, to call us from this misery to eternal happiness."<sup>5</sup>

See now, my dear brethren, how trials are good and useful for us. Tell me, says St. Chrysostom, if you were called to be a king or emperor here on earth, would you think yourself unfortunate if on the journey to the city where the crown awaits you you had to pass the night in a filthy stable and suffer hunger and thirst? Would you not rather prize all this most highly on account of the great good luck that awaits you? What folly then, when God calls you, not to an earthly, but to an eternal

This thought should make us prize adversity as a blessing.

<sup>1</sup> Gaudete et exultate, quoniam merces vestra copiosa est in coelis.—Matt. v. 12.

<sup>2</sup> Id enim quod in presenti est momentaneum et leve tribulationis nostrae, supra modum in sublimitate æternæ gloriæ pondus operatur in nobis.—II. Cor. iv. 17.

<sup>3</sup> Per multas tribulationes oportet nos intrare in regnum Dei.—Acts xiv. 21.

<sup>4</sup> Sic amicos suos deiecit Deus, ut exaltet; sic affligit spinis, ut coronet rosis.

<sup>5</sup> Tribulatio mittitur velut nuntius gratissimus, de præsentī miseria vocans ad felicitatem æternam.

kingdom, to consider as evils and misfortunes the trials by which God intends to bring you thither! O tribulations of this world! O poverty, sickness, destitution, disgrace, persecution, sorrow, of which this vale of tears is full! how few there are who know how to prize you at your true worth! If we were properly acquainted with your value and importance, we should not be horrified at the thought of you, but rather seek you with care, receive you with love, bear you with joy. We should look with a holy envy on him who is visited by you more frequently than we are; like the Apostle we should glory in nothing but in our sorrow and trials; with holy Job we should bless God in them, and with the Prophet David thank Him for them and say: "It is good for me that Thou hast humbled me."<sup>1</sup> I am thankful to Thee, O God! that Thou hast changed my shepherd's staff into a royal sceptre, my straw hat into a crown; but I look on it as a far greater favor that Thou hast humbled me, that Thou hast visited me with sorrow and tribulation, that from a king Thou hast made me a beggar and a fugitive; that Thou hast chastised me with war, persecution, pestilence, famine; that Thou hast taken my son from me while he was still in the cradle; "it is good for me that Thou hast humbled me;" all this is to my advantage, and therefore I owe Thee my best thanks for it. Let Joseph say to Pharaoh: it is good that you have exalted me; let Ruth say to Booz: it is good that you have made me rich; let Esther say to Assuerus: it is good that you have made me a queen; let Tobias say to the angel: it is good that you have restored my sight; David does not retract his words, and looks on it as the greatest benefit that he was visited by God with many trials and crosses: "It is good for me that Thou hast humbled me, that I may learn Thy justifications."<sup>2</sup> Thereby I am forced to keep Thy commandments; thereby I shall gain Thy eternal kingdom!

As we shall  
see in eter-  
nity.

O my dear brethren, if we one day meet in eternal happiness, how clearly we shall then see this truth! When we shall see how the good God has led us to heaven by the cross so wisely, then indeed we shall have to acknowledge that He punished us only with stripes of love, and that we should always have been grateful to Him for them. Many a one will then agree with that philosopher who, having lost all his possessions by ship-

<sup>1</sup> Bonum mihi quia humiliasti me.—Pa. cxviii. 71.

<sup>2</sup> Ut discam justificationes tuas.—Ibid.

wreck, and being thus forced to rely on philosophy, exclaimed: "I should have been ruined if I had not been so ruined."<sup>1</sup> If God had not made me poor, if He had given me wealth, I should have been ruined! If I had not so much pain and illness to suffer I should have been ruined; for I should have misused my health to enjoy forbidden pleasures! I should have been ruined and sent to hell forever if God had not taken this or that person from me, in whom all the affections of my heart were centred! I should not now be in heaven, but would have abandoned myself to all the pomps and vanities of the world, if I had not been persecuted and humbled! Now I know what a good thing it was for me to be sorely tried and afflicted!

Why then, my dear brethren, do we lose heart? Is it not great blindness on our part to entertain such fear and horror of that which is so very good and useful to us? To avoid that which must bring us to heaven? to indulge in murmurs and complaints, nay, almost to despair on account of trials and crosses by which we must gain an eternal crown? Eh! why should we weep and lament like little children, when we ought rather to laugh and make merry? A mother sometimes plays with her child and throws her apron over her face; the child at once begins to cry and howl as if it saw a ghost. Silly little thing! what is the matter with you? It is your mother, you see; she is only playing with you; she will make still more fun with you when she takes the apron off her face and again holds you in her arms. Oppressed mortals! why do you weep and moan when God throws over His face the dark veil of tribulation, and withdraws Himself for a while from your sight? Be not afraid! He is your heavenly Father; He is only playing with you that you may rejoice all the more in heaven. In a little while He will remove the veil and let you see His face. Hear how He comforted His sorrowing disciples when taking leave of them: During My absence you will have to bear many persecutions, and to suffer torments and martyrdom; but in a little while you shall see Me: "Let not your heart be troubled. . . . I will come again, and will take you to Myself, that where I am you also may be."<sup>2</sup> O comforting words! Why then should we weep? Ah, let us not squander and lose our tears in such a useless manner, but rather keep them for what is really deserving of being

And we  
should rather  
rejoice  
in adversity.

<sup>1</sup> *Perieram nisi sic perissem.*

<sup>2</sup> *Non turbetur cor vestrum. . . . Iterum venio, et accipiam vos ad meipsum, ut ubi sum ego, et vos sitis.*—John xiv. 1, 3.

bewailed and deplored, for what is really an evil. If the dark and gloomy night of sin should hide our God and His grace from us, oh, that is the time to weep, and mourn, and lament, because even one sin is a great and true evil; but such is not the case with adversity, which brings us nothing but good. Let sinners who do not love God weep and wail. They, I say, who do not love God, who in those troublous times persist so shamefully in offending Him. Oh, I dare not say all I might! Yet if I did so, it would be to no purpose, for those whom it would concern do not come to sermons; they have other schools where they receive instruction and guidance. I say no more of this. A few words are enough to hint at my meaning. Alas! they, I repeat, have cause to weep! But you, O just and most beloved children of God! with whom He shares the fruits of His passion and death, "be glad and rejoice, for your reward is very great in heaven." If sometimes the severity of your sufferings will not allow you to rejoice, at least bear them with patience, with a good intention for God and heaven.

Conclusion  
and purpose  
always to  
take the  
cross from  
the hand of  
God patient-  
ly and con-  
tentedly.

Truly, O my good God and Saviour! I acknowledge and confess that Thou dost not mean ill with me when Thou withdraw-est Thyself and Thy consolation from my sight, and that all the trials and crosses that afflict me are indeed good and salutary for me! If I knew no more than that Thou, my most loving Saviour, art looking at me in the midst of my sorrows, and that Thou hast sent them to me, that would be enough to convince me of their utility. Why then have I hitherto played fast and loose with my good fortune? Why have I laid the blame on others? made them objects of my wrath and displeasure, because they caused me sorrow and suffering? and all the time it was Thou, my dearest Father, who hadst decreed all these trials for me? Why have I complained and murmured on account of what is to my greatest advantage? Ah, if I could have back again those days that I then thought unfortunate, but which would have been most fortunate if I had not, alas! made them otherwise; those days and hours in which I rendered my crosses and trials fruitless by impatience, inordinate sorrow, nay, even frequent despair, and murmurs and complaints against Thee, my Father, who didst mean so well with me! Oh, how shamefully I have erred! In future I will make a better use of the cross; I give myself, my soul and body, all that I have, my honor and good name, my friends and acquaintances, and everything in the



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world into Thy fatherly hands, that Thou mayest do therewith according to Thy good will and pleasure. I now know and acknowledge that Thou canst not do anything to hurt or injure me; send me at once crosses and trials as many and as long as Thou wilt, only grant me patience to bear them; then I will accept them with gratitude and readiness, because it is good for me to be chastened here below. If I should sometimes be unruly, impatient, and discontented, O Lord! continue nevertheless to do as Thou knowest to be good for me. If the severity of my sufferings should cause me to weep and moan (I know Thou wilt not take that ill from me, because the nature of the cross is to cause pain and sorrow), do not spare me! My comfort shall be that Thou art with me; that Thou seest my misery; that Thou art the Author and cause of all my trials and tribulations. Here I will weep, that I may laugh hereafter; here I will mourn for a short time, that I may rejoice in eternity; here on earth I will suffer, that by suffering I may one day ascend to Thee in heaven, where I shall exult with unceasing joy, and say: "O good cross!" Amen.

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### SEVENTY-FOURTH SERMON.

#### ON PATIENT SORROW AS A FORERUNNER OF ETERNAL JOYS IN HEAVEN.

##### Subject.

To weep and sorrow in adversity here, with patience, is a sure sign that we shall rejoice forever in heaven.—*Preached on the feast of St. James, apostle.*

##### Text.

*Potestis bibere calicem, quem ego bibiturus sum?*—Matt. xx. 22.

"Can you drink the chalice that I shall drink?"

##### Introduction.

That was a hard question, and one that the disciples did not expect. They were speaking of the future kingdom of Jesus Christ, while He was alluding to the bitter chalice of His passion. They desired a high place in joys and honors, and the only answer He gave them was: "Can you drink the chalice that I shall drink?"

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By which He meant: to have a place in My kingdom is not so easy; it must be merited as I Myself intend to purchase it; I shall be mocked, ridiculed, scourged, nailed to the cross, and put to death, and thus enter into My glory. Can you endure all this with Me? If so, prove it, and then you may console yourselves with the assurance that you shall rejoice with Me in My eternal kingdom. My dear brethren, with reason does Thomas à Kempis say in his golden book of the Imitation of Christ: "Jesus has now many lovers of His celestial kingdom; but few bearers of His cross. All wish to rejoice with Him; few wish to suffer for or with Him." We all desire the joys of heaven, but we find it very hard and bitter, if, by the decree and will of God, we are sometimes tried by crosses and afflictions; then do we put on a sorrowful face, and weep and moan, and complain as if we were the most unhappy people on earth, although it is quite certain that without suffering we shall not enter with Christ into His kingdom of joys. So it is; if we wish to go to heaven we must make up our minds to bear our cross with patience here, and often to weep and mourn. Nay, this latter is a sure sign that our wish and desire to enter into heaven with Christ shall one day be fulfilled, as I now proceed to show for the consolation of all afflicted Christians who bear their trials patiently.

### Plan of Discourse.

*Patiently to weep and sorrow in adversity here is a sure sign that we shall rejoice forever in heaven. Such is the whole subject.*

Strengthen us all to bear our cross, O good God! by the hope of this eternal happiness, through the intercession of Mary and of our holy angels.

In what patient suffering consists.

But how can sorrow and patience exist at the same time in adversity? Can I suffer with patience, that is, contentment, and at the same time grieve on account of the evil that afflicts me? Truly, my dear brethren, there is no difficulty in that; otherwise to no purpose would Our Lord have said: "Blessed are they that mourn;"<sup>1</sup> "Blessed are ye that weep now."<sup>2</sup> So that He does not condemn or find fault with the opposition of nature that we experience, the bitterness of heart we feel, the trouble of mind we suffer, the tears we shed, the sighs we give vent to in adversity and affliction. For, no matter how great

<sup>1</sup> Beati qui lugent.—Matt. v. 5.

<sup>2</sup> Beati qui nunc fletis.—Luke vi. 21.

our patience and conformity with the will of God, yet it cannot take away from our nature its sensitiveness, nor from adversity its effects; therefore, when trouble or trial comes it must cause sorrow, bitterness, annoyance, weeping, and lamentation. The virtue of patience and contentment consists in this, that I reason with myself thus: it is now the will of God for me to suffer in this manner; and then to resolve with the will: therefore I wish that things should be with me as they are; I wish to sigh and weep in sorrow and trouble, since God has so ordered it for me. This I have frequently explained already.

Now a sorrow of that kind in the trials of life is, I repeat, a sure forerunner of eternal happiness in heaven. To prove this I need only refer to the infallible words of Jesus Christ in the Gospel of St. John: "Amen, amen I say to you, that you shall lament and weep," while the world shall enjoy all sorts of pleasures; but "your sorrow shall be turned into joy." That He is speaking of eternal joys is evident from what follows: "You now indeed have sorrow, but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice." With what sort of joy? With one that shall never end: "And your joy no man shall take from you." Nay, so closely has God connected temporal sorrow with eternal joy, that they who have no sorrow on earth shall have no share in the hope of future joys in heaven. Read the twelfth chapter of the Epistle of St. Paul to the Hebrews, and you will find this clearly stated: "My son, neglect not the discipline of the Lord: neither be thou wearied whilst thou art rebuked by Him. For whom the Lord loveth, He chastiseth: and He scourgeth every son whom He receiveth."

This is a  
forerunner  
of eternal  
joy.  
Proved from  
Scripture.

It does not follow from this that all who are afflicted and tried here on earth are children of God and heirs of heaven. Not by any means! For how many there are who suffer, either in their bodies by painful illnesses, or in their temporal goods by losses and misfortunes, or in their honor by shame and disgrace, or in their minds by continual melancholy and sadness; and they suffer all this like the dumb beast that is whipped, without any intention directed to God, with a bitter dislike, with murmurs and complaints against God, with curses, imprecations, blas-

Although  
not all who  
suffer shall  
be heirs of  
heaven.

<sup>1</sup> Amen, amen dico vobis, quia plorabitis et flebitis vos: tristitia vestra vertetur in gaudium. Et vos quidem nunc tristitiam habetis; iterum autem videbo vos, et gaudebit cor vestrum, et gaudium vestrum nemo tollet a vobis.—John xvi. 20, 22.

<sup>2</sup> Filii mi, noli negligere disciplinam Domini, neque fatigeris dum ab eo argueris. Quem enim diligit Dominus castigat: flagellat autem omnem filium quem recipit.—Heb. xii. 5, 6.

phemies, madness, and despair? How many are tormented by their own evil passions and inclinations, by inward and outward trials, and yet they persist in the state of mortal sin, and thus are not a whit the better for all their sufferings? "Such people," says St. John Chrysostom, "are not scourged like sons, but punished as criminals."<sup>1</sup>

But generally the elect must bear trials.

Yet if the words of the Apostle are true, "He scourgeth every son whom He receiveth," it follows clearly that all who are received as children of God and heirs to eternal joys must expect to suffer the rod of tribulation in this life, and it is equally evident that they who are not so visited, and do not replace the want of trials by voluntary mortification, are not in the number of the children of God who are elected to eternal life. According to St. Chrysostom there is not a doubt of that: "He who is not scourged is certainly not of the number of the sons of God."<sup>2</sup> "Tribulations are bitter," says St. Augustine, "but who would not drink the chalice of tribulation to escape the fire of hell? If you understand the promise of the Eternal Father, you should dread not to be scourged, but to be disinherited."<sup>3</sup> And this agrees with the conclusion drawn by St. Paul in the passage quoted: "But if you be without chastisement, whereof all are made partakers, then are you bastards, and not sons."<sup>4</sup> For "through many tribulations we must enter into the kingdom of God."

The reason of this is that trials enlighten the mind to good.

But why is that? Why must all who wish to rejoice in heaven for eternity suffer adversity here below? The first reason of this is taken from the nature and usual effects of trials, for they remove out of our way first and foremost that which is the greatest obstacle to our gaining eternal happiness. And, my dear brethren, what is the greatest obstacle we meet with on the way to heaven? It is sin alone. And what does sin come from? It has its origin partly in the darkness of our understanding, since we forget the presence of God, and the eternal fundamental truths that should be a restraint to keep us from sin make such little impression on our minds; partly from the perversity of our will, that is easily captivated and led astray by its evil in-

<sup>1</sup> *Isti non sicut filii flagellantur, sed sicut pessimi puniuntur.*—S. Chrys. Hom. 29. in Ep. ad Heb.

<sup>2</sup> *Qui non flagellatur, sine dubio non est in numero filiorum.*

<sup>3</sup> *Tribulationes amaræ, sed quis non bibat tribulationis poculum, metuens ignem æternum? Si promissa Patris bene agnovisti, timeas, non flagellari, sed exheredari.*

<sup>4</sup> *Quod si extra disciplinam estis, cujus participes facti sunt omnes; ergo adulteri, et non filii estis.*—Heb. xii. 8.

clinations to forbidden things. Now the Almighty makes use of the trials and crosses of life to cure both these evils; namely, to enlighten the mind and bring it to a true knowledge of its state, and to weaken the strong and evil inclinations of the will and keep them in restraint.

Thomas Figenus writes of a man who was so far gone in madness as to believe and tell others seriously that he had not a head; and no one could persuade him that he was wrong. At last an experienced doctor helped to cure him of his singular malady. Can you guess how? He tied on his head a heavy leaden weight; the weight and at the same time the coldness of the metal reduced the temperature of his overheated blood, so that at last he felt and acknowledged that he had a head. Oh, how many men, and even Christians, there are on earth, who are so blinded by temporal things as to believe that they have no head, that is to say, that there is no sovereign Lord of the world, as David says: "The fool hath said in his heart: there is no God."<sup>1</sup> There is no Ruler or Master of the world; there is no one to reward the good or punish the wicked; no one to judge our thoughts, words, and actions! How many, even if they have an obscure knowledge of this truth, yet live as if there were no Lord or God in heaven! Those people are fools who think and say they have no head. What is to be done to bring them to their right senses, or to prevent them from falling into idiocy, and to preserve their reason? "The burden of Damascus,"<sup>2</sup> as the Prophet Isaias says, describing the tribulations that afflicted the wicked city of Damascus. It is by the burden, the heavy weight of trial that the divine Physician cures or prevents such madness on the part of men. If adversity presses hard on them, oh, then they feel and easily acknowledge that they have a head, that there is a God in heaven, who judges their sins and punishes them according to their deserts.

David supplies me with another beautiful simile when he speaks of the tribulations and persecutions he had to suffer from his enemies. "They surrounded me like bees."<sup>3</sup> Like bees? What does that mean? Mark this well. Naturalists tell us of the bear, that his head is sometimes so filled with vicious humors that he almost loses his sight; but nature has given the animal a means of obtaining a cure. And what is that? He goes about in search

Shown by a simile.

Further explained by another simile.

<sup>1</sup> Dixit insipiens in corde suo, non est Deus.—Ps. xlii. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Onus Damasci.—Is. xvii. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Circumdederunt sicut apes.—Ps. cxvii. 12.

of a hive of bees, and when he has found one, he rushes right into the midst of it, and by his roaring and the disturbance he causes so irritates the bees that they rush at him and sting him about the head until it is quite swollen. The stings and swelling free him from the evil humors, so that he recovers his sight. Such is the meaning of the words of David: "They surrounded me like bees." My enemies, my persecutors, my rebellious children have stung my heart very sorely; but how good and salutary those stings are to me! They have cleared my head, which was swollen with pride, and have made me humble of heart; they have opened the eyes of my mind, which were darkened by evil inclinations and inordinate desires, so that I now know more clearly my God and my obligation of serving Him zealously.

While prosperity darkens the mind.

As long, my dear brethren, as our soul is clothed with flesh in the body, it is, as it were, confined in prison, and can have no other idea of created things but what it receives through the medium of the outward senses; now, since these latter only know of creatures what they outwardly perceive, they make corresponding impressions on the soul; but they have no idea of things as they really are in the sight of God. Hence it is that we have, generally speaking, such a great opinion of worldly fortune, of the goods and riches of earth, of pomp and splendor, of honor and esteem before men, of the comforts and delights of the body; because these things are painted in pleasing and agreeable colors to us by the sight, hearing, taste, and touch, therefore we easily allow our hearts and affections to be caught by such goods, while they are quickly led away from supernatural, eternal, heavenly, divine things, that we know only by faith, and of which our knowledge is obscure. Now, if a man lives in prosperous circumstances, so that he can enjoy to his heart's content those imaginary worldly goods, oh, then the eyes of his mind are blinded, and the slender light of faith that he still retains will soon be completely extinguished! And what will be the final result of that, if not forgetfulness of God, a distaste for heavenly joys, a disgust for supernatural goods, and the surrendering of all the affections to temporal things, which brings with it the entering on the broad road that leads to eternal ruin!

Hence we must be healed by trials, that

Therefore there is need of some salutary cure for the eyes of those who are to rejoice with God forever in the kingdom of heaven. What is that cure? "They surrounded me like bees;"

the cure that healed David. They must be attacked and stung by the bees, that is, they must be tormented and plagued by trials and adversity. A sting is given them by the death of some great man who is favorable to them, on the hope of whose protection they had built all their expectations of fortune. A sting comes through the premature death of husband, wife, dear friend, or some other person who was their sole comfort, pleasure, and joy in this world. A sting comes through the death of a dear child, who was looked to as the future support of the family, and a staff to lean on in old age. A sting comes through the loss of some important case or lawsuit, through the shame and disgrace that have to be publicly endured, through the painful illness that keeps them bedridden, through the secret poverty and want that oppress them. Ah, what sharp stings these are! But how good they are for the soul, if they who suffer them only know how to profit by them! How many evil humors they clear away from the head! How they open to the clear light the eyes of the mind that were formerly darkened! Then can the afflicted one see and acknowledge in his trouble and sorrow what he before refused to see or acknowledge, namely, how transitory and fleeting are all the goods that the world can offer; how ill-founded is the hope that is built on men; how all those desirable objects, those joys and pleasures, that formerly seemed so valuable to him, are in reality only emptiness; how his outward senses have shamefully deceived him, for they have painted the goods of the world in bright and pleasing colors. In a word, cured by the stings and arrows of misfortune, he learns to distinguish between truth and falsehood, and to know that there is a God above him who rules all, a God whom he must fear everywhere, a God of whose help and assistance he is in constant need, a God whose friendship he must always try to preserve.

This light and knowledge in the mind will, at last, as it were, force the will to seek God, to love Him as the one, true, constant, and supreme Good, so that if he must weep and moan in sorrow and affliction here on earth he may possess that Good forever in heaven. A city or fortress that cannot be taken by force of arms is often compelled to capitulate by famine. Many souls would resist all the divine inspirations if they were not forced to surrender by hunger, poverty, sickness, and other trials, and to enter on the road to the heavenly Jerusalem. St. Luke gives us a clear picture of this in the parable of the supper, by

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Shown by a  
Gospel par-  
able.

which Our Lord wished, literally speaking, to describe the invitation to the glory of heaven. "A certain man made a great supper, and invited many." Mark, my dear brethren, who were the first invited guests. They were all healthy, rich, opulent people, whose attention was taken up by the pursuit of riches, honors, and pleasures, as we see from the answers they sent. "I have bought a farm. I have bought five yoke of oxen. I have married a wife." Who would not think that they who are so richly endowed by God with so many goods would eagerly accept the invitation? Yet they all made excuse; they could not come, and that because they were too occupied with their goods and pleasures. So that the lord invited others, who at once readily and obediently accepted the invitation. Who were they? "Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor and the feeble, and the blind and the lame." See, says St. Augustine, who they are who fill heaven, that is, the eternal marriage-feast; namely, for the greater part, they who gain their way thither through the pressure of misery and adversity. And that appears still clearer from the following words of the same parable; for the places were not yet all filled, and the lord again said to his servants: "Go out into the highways and hedges; and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled."<sup>1</sup>

For thus we  
are violently  
withdrawn  
from the  
love of crea-  
tures.

But if the heavenly banquet-hall is to be filled in that way, why is it said: "Compel them to come in"? Has not man got his own free will to be saved or not? So says Christ in another place when He invites us to follow Him: "If any man will come after Me," if he chooses to enter heaven with Me, "let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me."<sup>2</sup> He will not force any one to do this. "If any man will come after Me." He who does not wish to do so may enter on the broad road to hell. Why then does He say here: "Compel them to come in"? Only consider, says St. Gregory, the people who were thus invited, and you will easily understand that the violence offered them did not interfere with their free will. They were not great, rich, noble people, who lived in large towns, and had

<sup>1</sup> Homo quidam fecit coenam magnam, et vocavit multos. Villam emi. Juga boum emi quinque. Uxorem duxi. Exi cito in plateas et vicos civitatis, et pauperes ac debiles, et cecos et claudos introduc huc. Exi in vias et sepes, et compelle intrare, ut impleatur domus mea.—Luke xiv. 16, 18-21, 23.

<sup>2</sup> Si quis vult post me venire, abneget semetipsum, et tollat crucem suam, et sequatur me.—Matt. xvi. 24.



magnificent houses, grand pleasure-gardens, splendid raiment, and bodily ease and comfort. They were lowly, simple, poor people, who earned their bread by the sweat of their brow on the highways, in the hedges, working in the field; and they are a figure of the oppressed and afflicted, who live in adversity and trials; these are forced and compelled to come to the great supper of heavenly glory. "They who being subdued by the trials of life, return to the love of God, and are freed from the desires of this world, are they not compelled to enter?"<sup>1</sup> Not that God does violence to their free will, but because adversity turns their hearts away from the love of creatures, and fixes them on the Creator alone, as the result of their own deliberate choice. The desire of carnal delights is taken from them by pain and sickness, the love of temporal goods by poverty and want, the love of honors by humiliation. Thus the chief obstacles to their salvation are removed, and since they find no consolation on earth, they are forced to seek it from God, to give themselves completely to His service, to repent of their sins, to bear their cross with patience, and to rejoice forever in heaven. That is the meaning of the words: "Compel them to come in."

By this violence God has drawn to Himself countless souls, among whom is that noble French lady of whom Father Cras-set writes. In the first years of her married life, her only son, the greatest joy of her life, died. She wept day and night, and refused all consolation. Finally, through a sort of holy desperation, she thought to herself: since God has taken from me what I most loved on earth, He may take me too. In pursuance of this resolution, she renounced all pomp and vanity, and with mutual consent lived in chastity with her husband till death; her whole time was spent in almsdeeds, prayer, fasting, going to holy Communion, and performing other works of devotion. Oh, she used often to say to herself, was I not a fool to take so to heart at first the death of my son? For as I now know, God could not have conferred a greater benefit on me than to deprive me of my love and vain joy. If my child had remained alive, I should never have thought of serving God and working for heaven as I do now. Eternal thanks to Thee, O Lord! for having thus drawn me to Thyself, as it were, by the hair of my head! Read the Lives of the Saints, my dear brethren; you will find

By that violence God has brought many to heaven. Shown by examples.

<sup>1</sup> Qui hujus mundi adversitatibus fracti, ad Dei amorem redeunt, atque a præsentis vitæ desideris corriguntur; quid isti nisi ut intrent, compelluntur?

hundreds of similar examples of people who were elected to heaven by crosses and trials, but not one in which salvation was secured without suffering. "This man is to Me a vessel of election," says Our Lord of St. Paul; this favored servant of Mine must "carry My name before the gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel." And how wilt Thou deal with him, O Lord? Wilt Thou confer abundant blessings and good fortune on him? "For I will show him how great things he must suffer for My name's sake;"<sup>1</sup> he must suffer many and grievous trials, and in that his good fortune is to consist. And to all the other apostles He left no other legacy but persecution, shame, and disgrace, imprisonment, chains, and painful martyrdom; all this He prophesied to them, but He adds: "Be glad and rejoice, for your reward is very great in heaven." Look at Me; "Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and so to enter into His glory?"<sup>2</sup> I was obliged to suffer, and so to enter into glory by suffering.

Therefore  
the saints  
used to pray  
earnestly  
for crosses.

That is the reason why holy servants of God, although they were not conscious of mortal sin, yet often begged of God to visit them with trials and crosses, as a sign that He was still their Friend, and it was only when they had nothing to suffer that they were in real affliction; nay, they would then humbly complain to the Almighty, and examine themselves most carefully to see whether perhaps there was not something in them displeasing to Him, on account of which He had forgotten them and determined to reward their former good actions in this life only; or else they made up for the want of other trials by severe penances and mortifications, lest they should be excluded from the number of the elect. Baverius relates of the Blessed Felix, that while he was suffering from a most painful illness the doctor once said to him: Brother Felix, I think you must be pleased to be sick; why do you not pray to God that, according to His promise, He may alleviate your pains, and restore you to health? Eh! replied Felix, that is bad advice you are giving me. If I knew that by merely once saying the name of Jesus I could be freed from this illness, I would not on any account allow that most sweet Name to pass my lips; for suffering is the greatest blessing that God sends me here, in order that, being plagued and tormented a little here on earth, I may rejoice all the more

<sup>1</sup> *Vas electionis est mihi iste. Ego enim ostendam illi, quanta oporteat eum pro nomine meo pati.*—Acts ix. 15, 16.

<sup>2</sup> *Nonne hæc oportuit pati Christum et ita intrare in gloriam suam?*—Luke xxiv. 26.

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hereafter in heaven. God forbid that I should ask Him to free me from this sickness! A certain virgin, mentioned by Father Rodriguez, of the Society of Jesus, attained a high degree of holiness, so that all wondered at her; when asked how she made such progress in virtue, she humbly gave answer: "I never was so severely tried and afflicted that I was not ready to suffer still more for God's sake; and when those sufferings were conceded to my prayers, I always looked on them as special benefits from God, and even thought myself unworthy of them."

Ah, Christians, we believe that to be true which Jesus Christ, our dear Saviour, has so often repeated in His Gospel: "Blessed are the poor; blessed are they that mourn; blessed are they that suffer persecution, etc.; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

*Exhortation and resolution to rejoice in trials.*

"You shall be made sorrowful; but your sorrow shall be turned into joy." And so on. And we even look on the holy servants of God as fortunate when we read in their lives, to our astonishment, how much they had to endure, and how with the utmost patience and joy of heart they suffered for the sake of gaining heaven; why then should we fear and dread the cross so much in this vale of tears? Why do we look on ourselves as unfortunate, if the loving hand of God sometimes strikes us rather hard. Why do we not rather rejoice, and thank the good God for having made us worthy of suffering with His chosen children? "Let us rather," I conclude in the words of St. Chrysostom, "mourn with a sadness that brings forth joy." Let the children of the world rejoice and make merry in their vanities and follies; let them flitter away their lives in idleness and comfort-seeking, in eating, drinking, amusing themselves; in playing and dancing; our joy shall consist in the true consolation of the Holy Ghost, which is felt by those who have God as their Friend, and who are resigned to His holy will; a consolation that is wont to be caused by the bitter tears shed through sorrow and abandonment, through hard work and poverty, through hunger and thirst, through bodily pain and sickness; a consolation of which St. Paul says: "I am filled with comfort, I exceedingly abound with joy in all our tribulation." <sup>1</sup> This comfort we shall experience if with the same apostle we turn the eyes of the mind to Jesus crucified, and follow that sublime exhortation: "Let us run by patience to the fight proposed to us,

<sup>1</sup> Repletus sum consolatione, superabundo gaudio in omni tribulatione nostra.—II. Cor. vii. 4.

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looking on Jesus, the Author and Finisher of faith, who having joy set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and now sitteth on the right hand of the throne of God;”<sup>1</sup> with the assured hope that if we suffer with Him for a short time here, we shall rejoice with Him forever in heaven: “Yet so if we suffer with Him, that we may be also glorified with Him.”<sup>2</sup> Amen.

*Another introduction to the same sermon for the third Sunday after Easter.*

### Text.

*Vos autem contristabimini, sed tristitia vestra vertetur in gaudium.*—John xvi. 20.

“You shall be made sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy.”

### Introduction.

A hard and unpleasant prophecy; you shall weep and lament, while they who live according to the vain world shall rejoice; you shall be sorrowful and wear out your lives in hunger and want, in chains and imprisonment, hunted from one town to another. Who are they to whom Our Lord prophesies such sad tidings? His own beloved disciples, who have sworn eternal fidelity to Him, and who are ready to sacrifice their lives, to shed their blood for Him. They are to have hard and evil times in this world. Yet comforting are the words that follow: “Your sorrow shall be turned into joy.” My dear disciples, be not disturbed; it will last only for a short time, and then you shall rejoice. My dear brethren, hard and bitter does it seem to us too, when we have sometimes, according to the divine will and decree, to weep and moan in all sorts of trials and adversities, especially when we seek to serve God truly, and therefore imagine that we do not deserve such chastisements. But, as I have shown on another occasion, supposing that we are so innocent that God has no reason for visiting us with trials in this life (although the sins we have committed and repented of, nay, even the venial sins that we commit daily would furnish reason enough for so afflicting us), should we not nevertheless be resigned and satisfied with

<sup>1</sup> Per patientiam curramus ad propositum nobis certamen; aspicientes in auctorem fidei et consummatorem Jesum, qui proposito sibi gaudio, sustinuit crucem, confusione contempta, atque in dextera sedis Dei sedit.—Heb. xii. 1, 2.

<sup>2</sup> Si tamen compatimur, ut et conglorificemur.—Rom. viii. 17.

all the divine decrees when we have to suffer adversity in this vale of tears, considering the shortness of the time of trial, and the eternal joys that Christ has promised to those who suffer? "Your sorrow shall be turned into joy." Yes, afflicted souls! that will be the case, as I shall now prove for your comfort. *Plan of Discourse as above.*

*See several sermons on the same subject in the preceding first, third, and fourth parts.*

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**SEVENTY-FIFTH SERMON.**

**ON THE CHEERFUL AND CONFIDENT ABANDONMENT OF THE CARE OF OUR SALVATION TO THE WILL OF GOD.**

**Subject.**

The Christian who serves God cheerfully, who trusts in God with full resignation of his will and child-like confidence, and steadfastly expects salvation from His hands, has, on account of this confidence and cheerfulness, an infallible sign that he will gain heaven: 1. because that cheerful confidence is a sign of a love that is most tender and pleasing to God; 2. because God is, as it were, forced to bring to eternal happiness the man who thus trusts in Him.—*Preached on the feast of St. Lawrence.*

**Text.**

*Non ex tristitia, aut ex necessitate; hilarem enim datorem diligit Deus.*—II. Cor. ix. 7. (From to-day's Epistle.)

"Not with sadness, or of necessity; for God loveth a cheerful giver."

**Introduction.**

Not without reason is this Epistle read by the Church on the feast of the holy martyr, St. Lawrence, for we know from the history of his life how cheerfully he served God. Joyfully did he give to the Lord the treasures of the Church in distributing them to the poor; joyfully did he sacrifice his life; so much so indeed, that he ran after Pope Xistus, shedding tears, and complaining that he could not die the death of a martyr; joyfully did he lay himself on the gridiron, so that he even laughed at

the terrible torments inflicted on him by the tyrant. "God loveth a cheerful giver." How pleased God must have been with such a cheerful servant! And what a glorious crown he must have received in heaven! My dear brethren, if we wish to render an acceptable service to God, we must serve Him, "not with sadness," but with joy of heart; "for God loveth a cheerful giver." Mark this well, you troubled, sorrowful, timid souls, who can hardly dare to hope with a child-like confidence that you are in the grace of God, and who always tremble when you think of your last end and eternity, and are constantly asking yourselves: how will it be with me? Am I to be one of the elect? What foolish and useless anxiety this is! Only continue to live piously, and serve the Lord with joy, and leave to God the care of your salvation; He will know how to secure that. Be of good heart; do not lose hope and confidence in God, and then you may be sure, as far as one can know it in this world, that you will gain heaven. This I shall now try to prove.

#### Plan of Discourse.

*The Christian who serves God cheerfully, who trusts in God with full resignation of his will, and child-like confidence, and steadfastly expects salvation from His hand, has, on account of this confidence and cheerfulness, an infallible sign that he will gain heaven. Such is the whole subject of this sermon. Why so? Because that cheerful confidence on our part is a sign of a love that is most tender and pleasing to God; the first point. Because God is, as it were, forced to bring to eternal happiness one who thus cheerfully trusts in Him; the second point.*

O God of goodness! who art more generous to us than we could hope for, encourage and strengthen our hope and confidence in Thee; for we now with confidence expect this grace at Thy hands, through the intercession of Thy Mother and of the holy angels.

A father has more pleasure in a son who is cordial and confidential with him than in one who only fears him.

To prove clearly that the love and service of the soul that thus trusts in God are tender and most pleasing to Him, all I need to do is to ask you one question. Tell me this: there is a father who has two sons: both are respectful, obedient, and ready (as all children should be) to follow the least sign given by their father. The first is always gay and cheerful, and never out of temper, no matter what his father's orders may be or what

his future intentions may be in his regard; all this is a matter of indifference to the son. Whatever the father gives him or takes away from him, whatever he forbids or commands him to do, the son is always in the same good humor; he is pleased to converse with his father, and if he has done anything wrong, he does not on that account avoid his father's presence, but rather acknowledges his fault candidly, and humbly awaits punishment to be inflicted on him, after which he shows the same loving confidence as before. The other, on the contrary, is ill-tempered, sour, melancholy, grows red and pale if his father speaks to him, is troubled at the least word, trembles when he has to do anything through obedience, lest he should do it wrong, and if he commits a fault, avoids the house so as not to meet his father, and thinks when he hears his voice that the rod is already laid on his shoulders, although his father has never given him cause for such absurd fear, but has shown him the same love, generosity, and affection the other son enjoys. Thus the second son is always fearful, timid, and anxious. Now, my dear brethren, which of the two loves his father best? Eh! think you, there is no need of asking the question; it answers itself. The first shows that he loves his father as a son should; the second loves him like a servant or slave, and fears more than he loves. What do you say, O father! to this? Which love pleases you best? There can be no doubt of it; the first son is your dearest child; in him you have a special comfort and joy, because his relations with you are so cordial and confident. The other gives you just cause for complaint now and then. Why do you act so to me, O son? I am not a stranger to you. Why should you fear and tremble in my presence? I do not wish to injure you. What do you want? And so on.

There, my dear brethren, you have a short and clear description of two different souls who serve God with piety and zeal: the one with child-like confidence, the other with constant fear. The one lives in peace and repose of conscience, a peace that springs from a firm confidence, and his only care is to do the will of His Creator. God is a good Lord, he thinks and says; He is my Father and is concerned about my body and soul; therefore I love Him, and I will not deliberately do anything to offend Him; if I sometimes go wrong, and I must confess that such is the case almost every day, must I on that account avoid my good Father? What else can He expect from

There are two kinds of souls that serve God: some serve Him with joy and child-like confidence.

a poor, miserable mortal but faults and failings? And what else can I do but humble myself, fall down at His feet, and confess my sins with sorrow? I know well that His mercy is infinitely greater than my ingratitude. If I fall twenty times, I shall rise twenty times, and with the help of His grace, which He has promised me, be more on my guard in future. It is right for me to fear such a great Lord; but He appears to me far more worthy of love than of fear; thousands of times have I had experience of His goodness to me; and I will hope for more and more from Him. If the evil one tempts me, my first thought shall be to fly for refuge to the lap of my Father who is in heaven, who loves me, who is with me, who knows my weakness; He will not forsake me. If I want anything I shall make it known to Him, and let Him then do with me as He pleases; He cannot act otherwise than for my greater good. Let me live where, how, and as long as God pleases; let me die when and how He has decreed; my end, my judgment, my eternity I leave altogether to His mercy. He will know how to manage so that things shall not turn out badly for me. "Although I have given Thee cause enough to damn me," he thinks and says with St. Augustine, "yet Thou hast not lost that wherewith Thou art wont to save."<sup>1</sup> I am certain that I serve a good God. With this confidence a soul of that kind goes to prayer, to frequent Communion, and to other works of devotion, on terms of the greatest intimacy with God, just as a child is with its father, or a bride with her spouse.

Others with  
fear and  
anxiety.

The other soul serves God too, but in quite a different manner. He loves God in truth, and carefully avoids offending Him, but through fear and anxiety is always uneasy and disturbed in his love. He has not heart nor courage enough to think that God loves him. His former sins are always present to his mind, and suggest sad doubts as to whether they are forgiven; he makes mill-stones out of his daily faults; he imagines that on account of his weakness, evil inclinations, and the many sins that he can still commit, it is next to impossible for him to save his soul; whatever wickedness he hears and sees he thinks he is guilty of, or will be guilty of at some future time. He has hardly any other idea of God than that of a strict, avenging, chastising God, whose goodness and mercy he never dares to hope for; He lives with God, not as a child does with its father,

<sup>1</sup> *Etal ego admisi unde me damnare potes, tu non amisisti unde salvare soles.*



but as a servant with his master, who is most strict in all things, and will not forgive anything; thus he is always in fear and dread. In this state he cannot make up his mind to go often to holy Communion, because he fears lest he should be unworthy through mortal sin. The examen of conscience before confession, the awakening of sorrow and repentance, the disclosure of his sins in confession, is like a rack that tortures his soul; confession never satisfies him. He approaches the table of the Lord, as it were, through compulsion, and with trembling steps, although our dear Lord invites him so cordially to it, that He may have intercourse with men as another man; and here he finds another cause for anxiety and dread, lest he should by an unworthy Communion eat and drink damnation; he dares not think of the hour of death; sometimes the idea of a long life is more than he can bear, and yet it seems terrible to him to die soon; not indeed because his heart is attached to things of earth, but because he looks on death as a hateful messenger who shall come to summon him before the dread tribunal, and his only thought is that it is a terrible thing to fall into the hands of an angry and avenging God; for he looks on his last hour as an entrance into an uncertain and long eternity, where he foresees nothing but the fire of hell, and the eternal torments, which he fears and certainly imagines are destined for him.

Now, I ask you again, my dear brethren, not which of these two souls leads the more comfortable and happy life, but which of them loves God more fervently and truly? Yet I need not ask, for you have already decided in favor of the first. There is no doubt that the love is more perfect of which St. John, the apostle of love, says in his Epistle: "In this is the charity of God perfected with us, that we may have confidence in the day of judgment," for "fear is not in charity: but perfect charity casteth out fear;"<sup>1</sup> much more then does it drive away a despairing fear and servile anxiety. The property of all who love is to be on terms of intimacy with each other, to seek each other's company and enjoy it; no tender love can exist when one of the lovers must tremble with fear before the other. Besides, which of the two souls has the better appreciation of the Almighty God? The one who trusts in Him cheerfully, or the one that is in such terror of Him? The first, beyond a

The former show by their confidence that they love God more tenderly than the latter do.

<sup>1</sup> In hoc perfecta est charitas Dei nobiscum, et fiduciam habeamus in die iudicii. Timor non est in charitate, sed perfecta charitas foras mittit timorem.—1. John iv. 17, 18.

doubt, for he appeals to all the divine perfections at once, and places them far and away above everything else. It is certain that one cannot love God and confide in Him in that manner, unless he has a lively faith that God is faithful and incapable of deceiving; all-knowing, so that our wants and needs are all before Him; good and loving, so that He is willing and ready to bring us to heaven; infinitely wise, so that He can bring this about easily and without trouble by means that are hidden from all human investigation; infinitely true, so that He will help us at once, constantly, without growing tired till the end; infinitely splendid and magnificent, so that He glories in showing His generosity in abundance; infinitely merciful, for He cannot be turned away from us by our past sins if we only truly repent of them; infinitely beautiful, and therefore worthy of all love on His own account. I am well aware that every true Catholic, even the most timid, has that belief with regard to God; but it does not seem so deeply impressed on the mind of the over-anxious Christian, nay, he seems to have some doubt of it, for he shuts out and excludes the thought of the consoling perfections of God, and concentrates his attention solely on His strict, and, as it were, inexorable justice. The man who is full of confidence shows it in his acts; he is so convinced of his belief that he does not even imagine there is any reason for him to be doubtful, but leaves everything and every circumstance to his heavenly Father. That is the way to have a just appreciation of the infinite majesty of God. St. Paul calls Him the God of hope, who is to be served with joy; for he says to the Romans: "Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing; that you may abound in hope, and in the power of the Holy Ghost."<sup>1</sup>

And God is more pleased with the former than with the latter.

Finally, which love and service is likely to be more agreeable to God and more according to His own heart? Again there is no doubt that it is the first. Let us ask ourselves what choice we should make if we had to decide between two servants; one who, although not very strong, yet does his duty cheerfully and confidently is a thousand times better for us than another who, although much stronger, yet never approaches his work but with a sour face, and is always in dread of punishment, thus serving only under compulsion. What man, who is not the wildest

<sup>1</sup> Deus autem spei repleat vos omni gaudio et pace in credendo, ut abundetis in spe, et virtute Spiritus Sancti.—Rom. xv. 13.

of savages, would not rather be looked on as kind and amiable than cruel and unmerciful? who would not prefer drawing men's hearts to himself by kindness to repelling them by sternness? who would not think it better to win the good services of his subjects by affability than to compel them to serve him by force of arms? In a word, who would not rather be loved and esteemed than dreaded and feared? If we are thus disposed by nature and reason, how much more is not that the case with the God of infinite wisdom and goodness! Eh! exclaims St. Chrysostom, we have a good and loving God, who, although He could force us to serve Him, yet prefers to invite us to His service in a friendly manner, to exhort us with mildness and sweetness, nay, even to entreat us, through sheer kindness. "He has changed the power of the Lord into the kindness of the Father, for He prefers to rule by love rather than by might."<sup>1</sup> He lays aside, so to speak, all that could frighten us in His majesty, and shows Himself in the appearance of a poor little infant; He hides the splendor of His glory, and gives Himself to us under the appearance of bread as our food, that He may be united with us; He invites us in the most friendly terms: "Come to Me, all you that labor and are burdened, and I will refresh you."<sup>2</sup> My service is not a tyrannical yoke, but is full of sweetness and consolation: "For My yoke is sweet, and My burden light."<sup>3</sup> You must not serve Me as servants do their masters through fear and necessity; but as children their father, through heartfelt affection: "For you have not received the spirit of bondage again in fear, but you have received the spirit of adoption of sons, whereby we cry: Abba (Father)."<sup>4</sup> He tries to gain our affections as a bridegroom does to gain the love of his future spouse: "My son, give Me thy heart."<sup>5</sup> He complains most piteously of the little love and confidence we have towards Him, and examines Himself to see if He has done us any injury: "What is there that I ought to do more to My vineyard that I have not done to it?"<sup>6</sup> Why are you so shy of Me, although "My delight is to be with the children of men?"<sup>7</sup> What have

<sup>1</sup> Dominum mutavit in Patrem, quia charitate maluit, quam potestate regnare.

<sup>2</sup> Venite ad me omnes qui laboratis et onerati estis et ego reficiam vos.—Matt. xi. 28.

<sup>3</sup> Jugum enim meum suave est, et onus meum leve.—Ibid. 30.

<sup>4</sup> Non enim accepistis spiritum servitutis iterum in timore, sed accepistis spiritum adoptionis filiorum, in quo clamamus: Abba (Pater).—Rom. viii. 15.

<sup>5</sup> Præbe fili mi cor tuum mihi.—Prov. xxiii. 26.

<sup>6</sup> Quid est quod debui ultra facere vineæ meæ, et non feci ei?—Is. v. 4.

<sup>7</sup> Deliciæ meæ esse cum filiis hominum.—Prov. viii. 31.

I done to you that you are so much afraid of Me? He exhorts us by His Apostle to lay aside all sadness, and to serve Him in joy and gladness: "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say, rejoice. Be nothing solicitous."<sup>1</sup> "Every one as He hath determined in his heart; not with sadness or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver."

Therefore the former have more reason to hope for salvation.

Therefore God requires of us a glad and cheerful service, a tender, child-like, confiding love. Judge now for yourselves who best corresponds to this desire of the Almighty. The sad and timid man who is always troubled with doubts about his salvation, or the servant of God who is cheerful in mind, and with full confidence leaves his salvation to the care of the Lord, and steadfastly expects it from Him? I hold with the latter, and draw this incontrovertible conclusion: if heaven is prepared for those who truly love the Lord God, as the Apostle says, "What things God hath prepared for them that love Him,"<sup>2</sup> then it is prepared before all for those who love Him in the manner that pleases Him best, that is, with a tender, heartfelt, confiding, and joyful love; therefore as this love is shown by a child-like confidence in God, and is preserved, increased, and confirmed by it, heaven is without the slightest doubt prepared for those who live piously, and are for the rest without anxiety, enjoying a firm hope of salvation. Even if God had not promised heaven to those who love Him, He would, so to speak, be compelled to give it to those who thus trust in Him, as we shall see in the

### Second Part.

The fidelity of God requires Him to save a soul of that kind.

Why so? His fidelity and honor require it. His fidelity, for He has given His word to that effect so clearly and expressly in almost all the Books of the Holy Scripture that we cannot doubt of the fulfilment of His promise without suspecting Him of a frivolous deceit, a deliberate act of treachery. "He that putteth his trust in Me," He says by the Prophet Isaias, "shall inherit the land, and shall possess My holy mount."<sup>3</sup> And again by the Prophet Jeremias: "Blessed be the man that trusteth in the Lord, and the Lord shall be his confidence;"<sup>4</sup> He shall stand to him. "For a certainty I will deliver thee; . . . thy life shall be

<sup>1</sup> Gaudete in Domino semper; iterum dico, gaudete. Nihil solliciti sitis.—Philipp. iv. 4, 6.

<sup>2</sup> Quæ præparavit Deus iis, qui diligunt illum.—I. Cor. ii. 9.

<sup>3</sup> Qui fiduciam habet mei, hæreditabit terram, et possidebit montem sanctum meum.—Is. lvii. 13.

<sup>4</sup> Benedictus vir qui confidit in Domino, et erit Dominus fiducia ejus.—Jerem. xvii. 7.

saved for thee." Why? "Because thou hast put thy trust in Me."<sup>1</sup> By the wise Ecclesiasticus: "Know ye that no one hath hoped in the Lord and hath been confounded."<sup>2</sup> By the Psalmist David: "Let all them be glad that hope in Thee." Why? "They shall rejoice forever, and Thou shalt dwell in them."<sup>3</sup> In another place: "Thou who savest;" whom? "them that trust in Thee."<sup>4</sup> And again: "And the Lord will help them and deliver them: and He will rescue them from the wicked, and save them." Why? "Because they have hoped in Him."<sup>5</sup> And he repeats this in the same psalm: "Commit thy way to the Lord, and trust in Him: and He will do it." What will He do? "And He will bring forth thy justice as the light; and thy judgment as the noon-day."<sup>6</sup> By St. Paul: "Hope confoundeth not."<sup>7</sup> Enough, O Lord! Why shouldst Thou need to confirm Thy promise so often? We trust in a man of honor when he has pledged his word; shall we then doubt Thine, although we know Thou canst not be untrue to it? Then let all rejoice who trust in Thee! They have, says St. Chrysostom, a document in their hands to assure them that their confidence is not misplaced; they have a sure pledge that they will rejoice forever.

Nay, suppose that God had not pledged Himself so emphatically nor so often; wipe out, if you can, all promises; yet His honor and glory would still oblige Him not to allow one to be lost who trusts in Him, but rather to bring him to heaven. It is innate in us, and is consistent with reason that we defend and protect as well as we can those who have a good opinion of us, who fly to us for protection and entrust themselves completely to us; and we should consider it derogatory to our honor and reputation not to assist such people in their needs. The son says to his father: I rely on you; you will, I am sure, see that things go well with me, for I know well that you love me; I want no other inheritance but what you have prepared for me. The servant says to his master: I will be faithful to you. What wages do you want? asks the master. Oh, replies the

We think that honor requires us to help those who trust in us.

<sup>1</sup> Eruens liberabo te . . . erit tibi anima tua in salutem; quia in me habuisti fiduciam.—Jerem. xxxix. 18.

<sup>2</sup> Scitote, quia nullus speravit in Domino, et confusus est.—Ecclesi. ii. 11.

<sup>3</sup> Latentur omnes qui sperant in te, in eternum exultabunt, et habitabis in eis.—Ps. v. 12.

<sup>4</sup> Salvos facis sperantes in te.—Ibid. xvi. 7.

<sup>5</sup> Adjuvabit eos Dominus, et liberabit eos, et eruet eos a peccatoribus, et salvabit eos; quia speraverunt in eo.—Ibid. xxxvi. 40.

<sup>6</sup> Revela Domino viam tuam, et spera in eo, et ipse faciet. Et educet quasi lumen justitiam tuam, et iudicium tuum tanquam meridiem.—Ibid. i. 5, 6.

<sup>7</sup> Spes non confundit.—Rom. v. 5.

other, as to that I do not care; there is no need for a contract between us; I know that you are a man of honor, and you can give me what wages you please, or think I shall earn by my work. One friend says to the other, with whom he has to share or do something: My good friend, manage the matter as you will; I have every confidence in your justice and honesty; you will not do me a wrong. An ignorant man says to his lawyer: There is my case, I leave it in your hands; I place all my hope in you; I know you can help me, and that you are an honest, upright man; nor have I the least doubt of your willingness to help me. What will this advocate, friend, master, father, think; how will they act, in view of the confidence reposed in them, if they are truly upright and honest? If they have any regard for reputation, honor, or good name, they will be encouraged and forced to show all the more favor and diligence in bringing the matter to a successful issue. That would not be the case if they had to deal with a man who is always uneasy and disputing with them, and whose first and most anxious care is to see whether they deserve his confidence. For my part, if any one thus showed his good opinion of me, and put all his trust in me, I should be quite taken up with him, and should do my very best to help him; and even if, before that, I had no idea of doing anything for him, of pleasing him, or conferring a favor on him, yet I should say to myself: here is a case in which I must show that I can do something, so that the good man may not have trusted in me to no purpose; for if I refused to help him now, he would think and say hereafter: oh, how shamefully I was deceived in that man! I thought he was a very clever person, and would have confided in him to any extent; but now I see that I trusted in him without cause, and that my hopes have all come to naught. I could not and would not have people talk of me in that way.

Much more  
then will  
God save  
those who  
confidently  
abandon the  
care of their  
salvation to  
Him.

Now consider, my dear brethren; is it likely that God will be less honest, less upright in His dealings with men, whom He loves so much, than men are towards one another, even though there be no further relations between them than that one applies to the other for help and protection? Is it likely that God will be less careful in what concerns His honor and glory than man, who sometimes forgets the rules of honesty, and sacrifices his good name? Shall that God, who is so jealous of His glory that He will not suffer the least thing that might be derogatory

to it—shall that God, I ask, allow or suffer to be deceived in His hopes the man who, filled with a most tender love for Him, serves Him with all possible diligence and faithfulness, not troubling himself with any questions regarding predestination, leaving the whole care of the future to Divine Providence, and trusting everything to His infinite goodness; who, considering the divine mercy, becomes full of courage, and cries out with *Isaias*: “Behold, God is my Saviour. I will deal confidently, and will not fear; because the Lord is my strength, and my praise, and He is become my salvation;”<sup>1</sup> or with *David*: “The Lord ruleth me, and I shall want nothing. He hath set me in a place of pasture. He hath brought me up on the water of refreshment;” I leave myself in His hands; I know that He is good, mighty, and loving; never shall I be confounded because I put my trust in Thee, O Lord! “and Thy mercy will follow me all the days of my life. And that I may dwell in the house of the Lord unto length of days.”<sup>2</sup> Shall God, I ask again, allow or have the heart to suffer such a well-meaning man to be deceived in his hopes of salvation? Shall he one day put it in his power to complain and say: oh, how vain and unfounded is the hope I placed in the Lord! I then imagined and believed firmly that His mercy and liberality were over all His works and perfections; now I see that I had a greater opinion of His goodness and generosity than they deserved; now I know that I trusted too much in the mercy of the Almighty; now I see, to my loss, that even with a firm confidence in the Lord one may still be put to shame!

Then indeed might the demons upbraid that soul to the shame and disgrace of its Creator, saying to it with sardonic laughter what the wife and friends of the elder *Tobias* said to him: “Where is thy hope, for which thou gavest alms and buriedst the dead?” Now thou art blind, and yet thou canst see how thou art deceived: “It is evident thy hope is come to nothing.”<sup>3</sup> In the same manner the demons might say to that soul: “Where is thy hope?” where the confidence you placed in God? Do you not see how badly things have turned out with

*Otherwise  
His honor  
would  
suffer.*

<sup>1</sup> *Ecce Deus Salvator meus, fiducialiter agam et non timebo; quia fortitudo et laus me Dominus, et factus est mihi in salutem.*—*Is.* xii. 2.

<sup>2</sup> *Dominus regit me et nihil mihi deerit; in loco pascuæ ibi me collocavit; super aquam refectionis educavit me. Et misericordia tua subsequetur me omnibus diebus vitæ meæ; et ut inhabitem in domo Domini in longitudinem dierum.*—*Ps.* xxii. 1, 2, 6.

<sup>3</sup> *Ubi est spes tua, pro qua eleemosynas et sepulturas faciebas? Manifeste vana facta est spes tua.*—*Tob.* ii. 16, 22.

you? You did your best to serve Him, and had a sure hope of heaven; ah, now you have no chance of it; He left you unaided when we tempted you; at the end of your life He left you to your own weakness, so that you fell shamefully, died after the fall, and are now our companion in the fire of hell for all eternity. Poor fool to trust in the Lord! "It is evident thy hope is come to nothing." Now I ask again, is it likely that the Almighty God would allow such a stain to rest on His honor? And could He not moreover in that case be suspected of a merciless cruelty?

Shown by an  
example by  
way of sim-  
ile.

Was not the Athenian senator condemned as cruel, because when a sparrow that was pursued by a hawk took refuge in his lap, he thrust it from him and gave it over to the bird of prey? Truly, all the other senators acknowledged that the act was a most unjustifiable one, and they turned him out of the senate as a disgrace to their whole body. What would they have done had he betrayed a reasoning being instead of a sparrow? What if he had acted thus to his own son? If the child pursued by a mad dog fled for refuge to his father, and the latter thrust him off, so that he was torn by the dog? And how would it be if God, our heavenly Father, should thrust from Him at the end, and leave helpless and desolate as a prey to the hellish vulture those whom He has adopted as His own children, His poor creatures, after they have served Him truly and cast all the care of their salvation into His lap, as into an ocean of goodness with full confidence? Oh, no! let me hear no more of such suppositions that are derogatory to His majesty and glory, to His infinite goodness and mercy! No! no! If God had not promised His heaven to those who serve Him and keep His commandments; if He had not promised it to those who love Him truly; if He had not promised it to those who hope in Him and trust in Him; yet His honor and glory would never allow any one who runs to His arms with such a firm, child-like, and constant trustfulness to be shut out from heaven and be condemned to hell. "Know ye that no one hath hoped in the Lord and hath been confounded." Therefore the holy Fathers teach that our hope is the measure of the graces we receive from Him. St. Thomas says it is the basis and foundation on which we get anything, just as love is the foundation of merit. Therefore as we merit before God according to the measure of our love, so we can also according to the measure of our hope obtain from Him



temporal, and much more, eternal goods. It is and must be true: "He will save them, because they have hoped in Him."

There, my dear brethren, we have an easy means, if we only rightly understand it, of securing our salvation. And an easy means too of living, even in this wretched vale of tears, full of consolation and joy, without fear or anxiety. Not without reason does St. Paul write to the Hebrews: "That by two immutable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we may have the strongest comfort who have fled for refuge to hold fast the hope set before us, which we have as an anchor of the soul, sure and firm,"<sup>1</sup> in this stormy and dangerous sea of the world. Truly, if a happy heaven is to be found on earth, it is enjoyed by those who serve God faithfully and zealously, leaving themselves and their fortunes with a child-like confidence in His hands. With the Prophet David they may confidently say to the Lord: "The light of Thy countenance, O Lord! is signed upon us; Thou hast given gladness in my heart. In peace in the self-same I will sleep, and I will rest; for Thou, O Lord! singularly hast settled me in hope."<sup>2</sup> Ah, how much trouble and anxiety we should escape if we were not wanting in holiness of life and child-like confidence in God! I remember once hearing this senseless wish expressed: Oh, that God had made me a dumb brute; then I should not have to fear the fire of hell! Would that I had never been born, and then I should not have to dread a miserable eternity! Unchristian wish! One that should be entertained only by the damned, who already feel that fire, and have no hope of ever coming out of it; it would indeed be better for them that they had never been born, as Christ said of the traitor Judas; but they must blame themselves for the state in which they are, for they refused eternal happiness. But we have still the firm hope of heaven if we only wish to live according to it. And I have often heard others say: oh, that I had died in my cradle; then I should be sure of heaven! I must confess that I have often hitherto been of the same opinion; but now I know that such thoughts are far too mean, despondent, and distrustful for the divine goodness and mercy.

Hence he who wishes to be sure of salvation must serve God with joy and child-like confidence.

<sup>1</sup> Ut per duas res immobiles, quibus impossibile est mentiri Deum, fortissimum solatium habeamus, qui confugimus ad propositam spem, quam sicut anchoram habemus animæ tutam ac firmam.—Heb. vi. 18, 19.

<sup>2</sup> Signatum est super nos lumen vultus tui, Domine; dedisti lætitiā in corde meo. In pace in idipsum dormiam et requiescam; quoniam tu Domine, singulariter in spe constituisti me.—Ps. lv. 7, 9, 10.

Conclusion  
thus to serve  
God con-  
stantly.

No, O my Lord and my God! I will live as long as it pleases Thee, and with the help of Thy grace, of which Thou hast assured me, I will spend my life in serving Thee faithfully and zealously; I shall not trouble myself about anything else; my end, my death, my future judgment, my last sentence, my whole eternity I leave in Thy hands, O God! who art most merciful, good, faithful, and desirous of my salvation! I relinquish all that to Thy good will and pleasure; Thou wilt manage matters for my greater good; and I am certain of this, because I trust in Thee as a child in its father. I must acknowledge that Thou hast never abandoned me under any circumstances, whenever I fled to Thee for refuge with confidence; much less wilt Thou refuse me Thy fatherly help in that most important affair of my salvation, in which there is question of escaping an eternal hell and gaining a blissful heaven. "Behold," I say with Thy Prophet Isaiah, "God is my Saviour; I will deal confidently and will not fear." I will not fear on account of the many and grievous sins I have committed in the past, because I know that Thou, O God! wilt not despise a contrite and humbled heart with which I have long ago repented of all my misdeeds! I will not fear on account of Thy strict judgment, because I know that Thou, my Saviour, art a favorable Judge to those who mean well with Thee! I will not fear on account of the fewness of the elect, because I know that if I only earnestly desire it, I can be of their number. I will not fear the devil, for with all his suggestions and temptations he shall not be able to lead me from the road to heaven, but will rather make me advance more swiftly thereon, provided Thou only, O Lord, art my Helper, according to Thy promise! I will not fear death, because Thou wilt accompany me with Thy grace even to the end! "The Lord is my strength and my praise, and He is become my salvation." If a spirit came from the other world and said to me what the devil, disguised as an angel of light, said to the pious hermit, I should answer like that hermit: Unhappy spirit, why do you torment yourself? You are rejected by God forever. I serve my God, not like a laborer for heaven alone, but as a child serves its father; for He is worthy for His own sake of all my love and service. And if that spirit were to affirm on oath and say: Unhappy man, you are to be damned! I should say with another servant of God: then I will love God as long as I am able to love Him; I will serve Him, and rejoice in His service as long as life

lasts. Meanwhile "I know in whom I have believed;" I know in what Lord I have placed my hope and confidence; and I know that He will not allow me to be deceived in my hopes. "Thy mercy will follow me all the days of my life; and that I may dwell in the house of the Lord unto length of days," where I shall see Him and praise Him forever! Comfort and console yourselves, pious Christians, with this thought, you who serve the Lord, and "serve Him with gladness." Amen.

*Another introduction to the same sermon for the fourth Sunday after Easter.*

**Text.**

*Nemo ex vobis interrogat me : quo vadis?*—John xvi. 5.

"None of you asketh Me: Whither goest Thou?"

**Introduction.**

Was it strange that the disciples did not ask where Our Lord was going? for they did not even know what journey He was talking of, as we read in the same chapter of St. John: "We know not what He speaketh." But Christ Himself told them that His journey was to lead to His Father in heaven; and then they became sorrowful, because they had to part from Him. My dear brethren, many of us seem to be more curious and anxious on this point; for there are many who often ask themselves with troubled minds: "Whither am I going?" Yet that may be all right, and so far it is a justifiable and necessary question, one that should be maturely considered every day by all of us; "where am I going to?" The journey of this life ends in a long eternity; therefore I must, above all, manage to secure a happy dwelling-place for myself there, and to go to Our Lord in heaven. But unfortunately most people do not arrive at this conclusion; they think sometimes of the question with anxiety. Shall I too go to heaven? they ask; but they take little trouble to live as Christians should, although a pious life is the only means by which we can get to heaven. As I have shown on the last occasion, this care and anxiety is unnecessary, foolish, and useless. Sinners, repent and amend! pious Christians, only continue to live piously and you will be saved. *Continues as above.*

*On Confidence in God, see several sermons in the preceding first and fourth parts.*

# CONCLUSION OF THE WHOLE SUBJECT,

AND

## SEVENTY-SIXTH SERMON.

### ON THE CONSIDERATION OF ETERNITY.

#### Subject.

The consideration of eternity is proposed to all as an excellent teacher.—*Preached on the feast of the Circumcision.*

#### Text.

*Postquam consummati sunt dies octo.*—Luke ii. 21.

“And after eight days were accomplished.”

#### Introduction.

In the beginning of the academical year parents and guardians are wont to seek out an intelligent and suitable preceptor and teacher to instruct and train their children; for they are well aware that that is a most important matter. Similar, nay, greater, my dear brethren, is the care that urges me with regard to your immortal souls; a new year has begun; the old has passed away; this new year, and perhaps ten, twenty, thirty, forty, and more shall pass away before it will be said of us: “Time shall be no longer,”<sup>1</sup> and a long, unbounded eternity shall follow. In the beginning of last year I wished you a good time; to explain now and improve on this wish, I desire for each and every one of you with all my heart, along with a year filled with blessings, a happy eternity; and that my wish may turn out well and happily for you all, I will now propose that same eternity to you as a master and teacher.

<sup>1</sup> *Tempus non erit amplius.*—Apoc. x. 6.

Plan of Discourse.

*What an excellent teacher it is, I shall explain in the first part. What salutary doctrine this teacher will give to each one in every state of life, shall follow in the second part. It is a consoling subject for the pious, salutary for the wicked, good for all.*

Immortal, eternal God! who art from all time, and shalt be always, enlighten our minds, through the Mother of Thy Son, and the intercession of our holy angels, who attend on Thee in eternal joys, that we may understand even one small point of the vast eternity, and so understand it that we may be induced to lead such a life as shall bring us to a happy eternity.

St. John Chrysostom supplies me with a very apt simile for my subject; go with me, he says, although not exactly in those words, yet with the same meaning; go with me in thought into a school where a number of little boys are sitting together; the master is not present, or has just been called out. Now look through the cracks in the door, and see what takes place. Talking, laughing, chattering is the least mischief they do; they run here and there like a swarm of bees; books, paper, inkstands, hats, whatever comes first to hand, fly from one to the other; and there is an uproar as if the whole building were on the point of being turned inside out. What is the cause of that? Why are the children so unruly? They are not sent to school by their parents for that purpose, but rather to learn, and to use their precious time in diligent study. And the duty of study is preached to them so often by their master as well as by their parents! Yes, indeed! it is easy to talk of preaching and learning! They trouble their heads little about such things; they are children and act like children. We ourselves were the same when we were young. But wait a while; see how in a moment they become as quiet as possible; it seems as if not even a mouse were stirring in the room. One snatches up an open book; another scratches his pen over the paper, although there is no ink in it; others say over their lessons very diligently to themselves; one would think that they are bent on learning all the sciences in one day; they all sit in their places with downcast eyes, on their best behavior; they seem to be so many good angels; not one stirs or makes the least noise. What is the reason of the sudden change? One man alone has caused it; the teacher has opened the door, and walks in with an angry and

Children are apt to be unruly when the master is away.

frowning face. That is enough; there is an end now to all the mischief.

Our master  
is the con-  
sideration  
of eternity.

See there, continues St. Chrysostom, how it is with us mortals. Our evil inclinations, passions, and desires, of which a considerable number are found in every man, are not a whit better, nay, they are far worse than unruly children who have no sense, who never allow themselves to be directed by right reason. The teacher and master who can best hold them in check is the consideration of the last things, of the eternity that is approaching: "the mistress of rule and discipline,"<sup>1</sup> says the saint. When this teacher turns his back, and finds no place in the mind through want of a lively and vigorous faith, there is little good to be hoped for, and hardly anything else to be expected but that the soul in its wantonness and perversity will go to eternal ruin.

From the  
forgetful-  
ness of it  
comes a  
dissolute  
life.

And in fact, my dear brethren, to speak seriously of the matter, how comes it that most men are so stupid and careless of their souls, so little troubled about their salvation, so cold and tepid in the service of God, so apt to squander the years of their lives in sin? How is it that there are so many confessions, but so little amendment? That true, Christian virtue and holiness are so rare, while vice flourishes everywhere; and therefore of all who are called to heaven so few get there, while there is such a far greater number who go to hell? Perhaps we do not believe that after this life another awaits us, which is eternal? But at all events, among Catholics there is no one who does not profess to believe this. Do we perhaps not know to what end we are created, and why we are sent by God on this world? But no one is ignorant of this either. There are preachers, spiritual books, teachers, and instructors enough to remind us of these things and impress them on us incessantly. Have we perhaps no pleasure in the thought of the delights of heaven, no fear or horror of the torments of hell? Even here there is no want; no one is so foolish as to wish to be damned; no one so silly as not to be delighted at the thought of the joys of heaven; no one so despairing as not to hope and wish to be saved. What then is the cause of our being so dilatory in the important affair of our salvation? Whence this dissipation of mind on our part? Ah, we are like the little children! The teacher is not at home; eternity and what it has in store for us is excluded from our

<sup>1</sup> *Magistra regulæ et disciplinæ.*

thoughts. "With desolation is all the land made desolate," says the Prophet Jeremias, "because there is none that considereth in the heart."<sup>1</sup> If we sometimes hear, read, or think of eternity, it is only in a superficial manner and cursorily; we do not take it to heart; we do not consider and ponder on it as we should. The mind, memory, imagination, the whole outward and inward man, generally speaking, is concentrated only on what we see with our eyes and touch with our hands; we are so absorbed by temporal goods that eternal things have no place nor room in our hearts. What we most fear and avoid are temporal misfortunes and calamities; we do not dare to reflect on the endless sufferings of eternity in order to inspire ourselves with a salutary horror of them.

If we spent every day only the space of one or two *Misereres* in meditating with the penitent David, and bringing this teacher before our minds, what a sudden change and amendment there would be in our lives! "My eyes prevented the watches," says David of himself: "I was troubled, and I spoke not. And I meditated in the night with my own heart;"<sup>2</sup> while others were sleeping, drinking, gambling, dancing, amusing themselves, I meditated with my own heart. And what, O holy Prophet! was it that so interfered with your rest? Hear this, my dear brethren, "I thought upon the days of old: and I had in my mind the eternal years."<sup>3</sup> I thought at last of my past years and days, and saw how quickly they passed, and I brought my mind to bear on the future eternal years, and on how it would be with me then. Ah, said I to myself: "Will God then cast off forever, or will He never more be favorable again? Or will he cut off His mercy forever?"<sup>4</sup> Alas! will God then perhaps reject me? and that forever? Or after this so short time of my life, shall I have reward and joys to expect? and that forever? This thought has made me at once examine my life, and purify my heart: "I was exercised, and I swept my spirit."<sup>5</sup> I have swept out my conscience as with a broom; I have feared all my works; I have brought all my actions under a better system; "And I said: now have I begun: this is the change of the right hand of

The consideration of eternity made David pious.

<sup>1</sup> Desolatione desolate est terra, quia nullus est qui recogitet corde.—Jerem. xli. 11.

<sup>2</sup> Anticipaverunt vigilas oculi mei; turbatus sum et non sum locutus. Meditatus sum nocte cum corde meo.—Ps. lxxvi. 5, 7.

<sup>3</sup> Cogitavi dies antiquos; et annos æternos in mente habui.—Ibid. 6.

<sup>4</sup> Numquid in æternum projiciet Deus, aut non apponet ut complacitor sit adhuc? Aut in finem misericordiam suam abscindet?—Ibid. 8, 9.

<sup>5</sup> Exercitabar, et scopebam spiritum meum.—Ibid. 7.

the Most High;"<sup>1</sup> now will I begin to serve my God better, and to work more zealously for the long eternity that awaits me. This meditation has made bitter and tasteless to me all the joys and vanities of the world; it has made labor and austerity sweet and agreeable to me.

We should  
often make  
the same  
meditation.

Oh, "I had in my mind the eternal years"! Would that they made the right impression on our hearts also! Would that we only deeply considered and pondered on this: I am living here. Where? On earth, as one banished into a poor, miserable land, like a stranger and sojourner; I am lent to earth only for a time, but not for all time. How long have I lived already? Twenty, thirty, forty, fifty, and more years have elapsed since my birth. Where has that time gone to? It is gone like a shadow that has vanished, like a ship that leaves no trace of its course; like a bird that flies through the air, and no man can tell whither it goes; like a flash of lightning that appears, and at once we lose sight of it. How long have I to live still? That I cannot tell. Perhaps my life will soon come to an end; even if it lasts for fifty or a hundred years longer, all this time shall pass away like the former years; sooner or later the end of my life must come; sooner or later I must say: good-bye house and home! good-bye pleasures and property, honors and offices of this world! Another will be your master! Good-bye parents and children, dear friends and acquaintances; I am going away from here. Where? My body is going to the tomb. But what of the soul? Shall it also be destroyed with the body, like the dumb beasts? No, for it is immortal! Where shall it go then? "Man shall go into the house of his eternity,"<sup>2</sup> such is the answer of the Wise Man: he, the soul, shall go into eternity. Into what eternity? "Into the house of his eternity;" each one into that which he has deserved here. How many eternities are there? Only two; one that exceeds all our imaginations of happiness; another that consists of all imaginable miseries. One of these two I must of necessity have as my lot. "One of the two," cries out St. Bernard in terror, "either to be tortured with the wicked, or to rejoice forever with the saints."<sup>3</sup> Ah, always! always! a little word, but how much it contains! When I am once surrounded by thee, O eternity! if I shed a single tear only once in a hundred thousand

<sup>1</sup> Et dixi: nunc coepi; hæc mutatio dexteræ Excelsi.—Ps. lxxvi. 11.

<sup>2</sup> Ibit homo in domum eternitatis suæ.—Eccles. xii. 5.

<sup>3</sup> Unum de duobus, aut semper cruciari cum impiis, aut semper lætari cum sanctis.



years, and shed enough of them to fill the ocean and the whole world, shall there then be an end of my eternity? No! I shall then continue as in the beginning to burn, if I am in hell; not even then shall there be an end of my joys if I am in heaven! But, O my God! shall I not be able for once to change one eternity for the other? Oh, no! where the tree falls, there shall it be; whether to the south or to the north. If I am once happy in heaven, I shall be so for all eternity, as long as God is God; if I am once unhappy in hell, I shall be so for eternity, as long as God is God! It depends on me now which of these two eternities I shall choose; it depends on my life, whether I lead a good or a bad one; on a life of which I cannot say that it will last to the end of this day; on a life that is measured by short, uncertain years. Can I venture to say that I shall be able to burn in hell forever, without hope of release? Oh, God forbid! No! I cannot hold a burning coal in my hand for a quarter of an hour; a pain in the head or tooth at night makes me think the night a year long! Why then should I not so live for a short time as to escape terrible torments forever? Should I not readily make up my mind to be happy with God and His angels for eternity, without any fear of my happiness coming to an end? Oh, truly! Would I were there already! I desire and wish for nothing else but my eternal welfare. Why then should I not live for a short time so as to gain eternal joys?

Would not these thoughts, my dear brethren, if we frequently and deeply pondered on them, leave behind a most salutary impression on our hearts? Could we then continue to live as people generally live in the world? Would it be possible that so many vices should be indulged in so freely, which are now practised without the least sense of shame, and for the most trivial causes? Carnal pleasure that I have enjoyed by a momentary voluntary thought, by an impure look, by an unlawful love, by an indecent act: what a short time thou hast lasted! Long ago thou art vanished, and yet on thy account I shall perhaps for all eternity be deprived of the indescribable joys of heaven, and burn in the pit of hell! Handful of gold that I have gained unjustly! how canst thou help me when time is over for me? But what wilt thou cost me in eternity? For thy sake I can and must, unless I repent and make due restitution, lose the joys of heaven forever, and suffer terrible poverty and want in hell! Drunkenness, what hast thou brought me in time? Thou

Then we  
should avoid  
all sin.

hast perhaps shortened my already short life. And what dost thou prepare for me in eternity? A chalice full of the gall of dragons that I shall never be able to empty, along with a fierce hunger and devouring thirst; while without thee I could be forever satiated in the kingdom of my Lord! Secret hatred that I entertain against my neighbor; angry curse that I utter against him; uncharitable talk by which I injure his good name; revenge by which I glut my anger against him: what misery you prepare for me. All I can expect from you is implacable anger, hatred, rage, malediction, with which I shall persecute myself for all eternity! Childish fear, foolish shame that closed my mouth in the confessional and prevented me from telling my sins candidly, what inheritance have I to expect from you? Everlasting shame and disgrace with the demons in hell, although if I had overcome myself for the space of one Our Father to speak truly to a man like myself, I might have enjoyed peace of conscience on earth and a throne of glory in heaven. Human respect! Not to displease another, to keep some one as my friend, not to interrupt the enjoyment of my companions, to cause others to laugh, to imitate unlawful customs; is it possible that for thy sake I have sacrificed heaven and condemned myself to hell forever? Yes, that happens daily, and with thousands of reasoning beings. But would it happen so easily if our hearts and minds were armed by the thought of eternity? Oh, no! that could not be! Not one would sin if he only thought of eternity when about to sin. God Himself, the infallible Truth, assures us of this: "Remember thy last end, and thou shalt never sin."<sup>1</sup> Otherwise you are mad and foolish, or else you do not believe in eternity. For there is no temptation so violent, no difficulty so great as not to be overcome by this thought, says Thomas à Kempis; "never can the servant of God be overcome in combat, or overwhelmed by temporal trials, if he always keeps eternal goods and evils before his eyes."

And lead a  
holy life  
like the ser-  
vants of  
God.

This is the salutary thought that filled the deserts with hermits and convents with religious and virgins consecrated to God, whose object was to escape an unhappy, and gain a happy eternity. This is the thought that encouraged so many thousands of martyrs to bear with patience, nay, with joy, the most atrocious torments that tyrants could inflict on them. This was the thought that armed St. Jerome with the hard stone with

<sup>1</sup> Memorare novissima tua, et in aeternum non peccabis. — Ecclus. vii. 40.

which he used to beat his breast; that placed the iron cuirass on the bare body of St. William; that kept St. Simon Stylites on the top of the pillar for so many years, exposed to heat and cold, to wind and weather, rain and snow. It is this thought of eternity that moves holy servants of God to lose their goods and properties, and a thousand lives, if they had them, rather than consent to sin. O faith! holy faith! art thou then no longer the same as thou formerly wert for good and pious Christians? Otherwise how is it that thou hast so little power, such slight influence with the greater number, who in spite of thee continue to live in sin? "O eternity!" exclaims St. Augustine, "he who thinks of thee and does not repent, is either without faith or without a heart."<sup>1</sup> Yet they believe, as they say; and that they have a heart is evident from the eagerness with which they pursue earthly and sinful joys. What they are wanting in is recollection: "There is none that considereth in the heart."

My dear brethren, if we wish to spend this year, in case God grants it to us, and all the rest of our lives in a pious and Christian manner, so as to gain a happy eternity, then let us never forget this lesson, never neglect the warnings of this teacher; let us often think of eternal things. It is a serious thought, I acknowledge it; there is no sensual comfort to be found in it; but is there less of truth in it on that account? Is the thought of less advantage or necessity? Shut your eyes to it as closely as you will, you cannot escape one of the two eternities. Will you be therefore less happy in heaven, if you get there, or less miserable in hell, if you should be doomed to eternal torments? Consider for a moment: if the bare thought of the eternal torments of hell is enough to terrify and frighten us to such an extent that we dare not meditate on it, what must it be actually to feel those dreadful torments forever? Is it not better then to go down to hell for a short time in thought, that we may not become living victims of eternal flames after this life? "In all thy works remember thy last end, and thou shalt never sin."<sup>2</sup> I shall address myself to people of different states in the

Resolution  
often to  
meditate on  
eternity.

## Second Part.

Gentlemen of the clergy and laity, in a few words I can say This teacher

<sup>1</sup> O æternitas! qui te cogitat, nec poenitet; aut certe fidem non habet, aut si habet, cor non habet.

<sup>2</sup> In omnibus operibus tuis memorare novissima tua, et in æternum non peccabis.—Eccius. vii. 40.

is introduced to the clergy and laity.

much to you. Although you are well educated, and, as I trust, are well acquainted with the duties of your state, yet I recommend you often to go to this teacher for a lesson; every day, as long as you live, you should learn a short lesson from him; this will certainly not be of any hindrance to you in your spiritual or worldly duties; it will rather remind you of the beautiful words of St. Augustine: "If they are thought prudent who manage affairs so as not to lose a few days, how foolish they must be who live so as to lose the eternal day?"<sup>1</sup> That you may not be in the number of the latter, be diligent in the consideration of eternity, and whenever you are about to undertake anything, ask yourselves: what will this profit me for eternity? How will it help me to a happy eternity? In that way you shall learn so to act in every circumstance as to be great and noble lords with the supreme Lord in His eternal kingdom.

To married people.

Married people! fathers and mothers of families! must I send you also to school, and lay fresh burdens on your shoulders, although as it is you can hardly find an end to the countless cares and anxieties that fill your minds every day? Truly you have enough to think of; but nevertheless you should leave one little place in your minds for an earnest, serious thought of eternity. Hear the warning of St. Augustine: "Know and understand that we are not Christians merely to be solicitous for this life alone;"<sup>2</sup> merely to see how we are to support ourselves and those under our care in a manner suitable to our state in life. O my God! in that case, to no purpose wouldst Thou have come down from heaven, in order to teach us; to no purpose wouldst Thou have proposed that heaven to us as our end and reward, if our thoughts had to be turned mostly on the means of preserving this short mortal life. "You must know then that we are Christians, that we may always think of the next life and its eternal rewards." Therefore God has placed you as masters and mistresses over your servants, as fathers and mothers over your children, that you may so rule and govern them as to bring their souls and your own to a happy eternity, and that none of them may be sent to hell through your fault. To the careful discharge of this duty you will be animated by the teacher, eternity, if you only think of it often and seriously, and firmly re-

<sup>1</sup> *Et prudentes putantur, qui agunt, ne perdant paucos dies; quam stulti sunt, qui sic vivunt, ut perdant eternam diem?*

<sup>2</sup> *Agnoscite et intelligite; non ideo Christiani sumus, ut de hac tantummodo vita solliciti simus.*

solve in your own minds: I will be happy for all eternity; I must and will have all belonging to me with me in heaven; to that end I will often repeat the prayer of the Catholic Church: "O God! the Protector of those who hope in Thee, without whom nothing is lasting nor holy; shower down on us Thy mercy, that under Thy rule and guidance we may so pass through temporal goods as not to lose eternal joys."

Unmarried men and women! not to frighten you, as you perhaps anticipate, with terrible thoughts of eternity, I shall represent it to you in none but pleasing colors. Any pleasure or delight, no matter how sweet, if too long protracted, becomes a pain and torment. What is more delightful to the ear than good music? But let it last for eight or nine consecutive hours, and you will get completely disgusted with it. People throng eagerly to the theatre to gratify their eyes and ears; but if the play is too long, how they yawn and fidget, and study their programmes to see if the end is near! And how pleased they are to be at the door again! It is a great comfort to lie at ease in a soft feather bed; but try, as St. Lidwina did, to lie for three hours in the one position while awake, and you will think you are suffering an intolerable martyrdom. How would it be if you were compelled to listen to the music, to look at the play, to lie in the soft bed for a whole year without change or interruption? It would be simply intolerable. Now you may reason in this way with yourselves: if even pleasure and recreation become a torment through length of time and want of change, what would be my feelings in that place where, without any comfort, or alleviation, or change, all kinds of pains and torments have their abode, and that forever? If I think it hard to listen to good music for a whole day, how should I bear the howlings and blasphemies of the damned for all eternity? If I cannot look at a delightful play for a day, how should I bear the hideous goblins and phantoms of hell for eternity? If I cannot lie for one night in a soft down bed without turning from one side to the other sometimes, how should I spend thousands of millions of years, all eternity, in the fire of hell, where the bed is of burning coals, and the covering of flames of sulphur? O my God! no! I am far too weak to stand that; the bare thought of that torment lasting forever is too much for me. I could never bear the actual pain itself. That thought will make you careful to avoid the occasions of sin, to shun all dangerous places and con-

To the unmarried.

versation, to mortify the outward senses, especially eyes and ears; so that you will do nothing even in thought or desire that might bring with it such a painful, intolerable eternity.

To the  
afflicted.

Comfort and consolation for you, widows, orphans, desolate, sorrowful, and afflicted Christians! Joy and comfort, I say, you shall receive from this teacher, the meditation of eternity; for all the trials you now have to bear by divine ordination, oh, what a short and uncertain time they will last! But they shall be succeeded by an eternity of joys, which you, more than any one else, can promise yourselves with certainty in that kingdom of which it is said: "Through many tribulations we must enter into the kingdom of God,"<sup>1</sup> provided you only bear your cross with patience for God's sake for a short time. Tell me, if God were to give one of you the choice either of living nine hundred years in this world in all kinds of delights, on condition of spending the first five years in a gloomy dungeon in all kinds of suffering; or of passing the first five years in pleasure, and all the rest of the time in suffering and misery: which would you choose, if you had to select between the two things, and liberty of choice were allowed you? I do not think you would hesitate long, and that you would certainly prefer to suffer patiently for five years in order to spend the other eight hundred and ninety-five in pleasure. For what are five years compared to that vast number? And if during the first year or so you would feel the hunger and thirst somewhat keenly, you would soon learn to comfort yourself with the thought: oh, this will not last long; five years will soon come to an end, and then joy shall be my portion for a long time. And this thought should now, too, be your comfort and support. What are, I will not say five, but thousands and millions of years compared to eternity? They are nothing. Now you are promised a whole eternity of all imaginable delights if you only accept your cross willingly from the hand of God, and bear it without sin and with contentment for the sake of heaven for a few short years; of which perhaps not twenty, nor ten, nor even one still remains to you. Therefore whenever weak nature complains and murmurs against the will of God, say at once: this cannot last long; it will soon be over, like what preceded it, and then eternal joys shall come.

To work-  
people.

You work-people in your shops, servants in your domestic duties, and peasants at your daily toil, should arm and encour-

<sup>1</sup> Per multas tribulationes oportet nos intrare in regnum Dei.—Acts xiv. 21.

age yourselves with the same thought. The days of our life "are like the days of a hireling,"<sup>1</sup> as the Holy Ghost tells us by the Prophet Job. See that poor man who has to bend down to the ground a hundred times a day, and to toil and sweat till he exhausts his bodily strength; yet he has some comfort in the midst and in spite of the hard labor he must undergo. What is that? The hope of resting in the evening and receiving his well-earned wage. You too have to bear the heat and burden of the day, and to swallow many a bitter morsel while in service; but, oh! rejoice at the approach of evening. Yet one thing I beg of you: let not the miserable wage you receive from your masters and mistresses be the end of your labor, otherwise you would indeed be most wretched; you must look far higher, and not sell your work at such a low price; every step you take, every movement of your hands can and must earn for you an eternal reward; only be careful to keep in the state of grace, in the friendship of God, and offer your daily work to the Lord with a supernatural intention; then you can rejoice in your hearts at the approach of evening, according to the words of the lord in the Gospel to his steward: "And when evening was come, the lord of the vineyard saith to his steward: Call the laborers and pay them their hire."<sup>2</sup> What hire? An eternal reward in the kingdom of heaven.

O eternity! O long eternity! come now, and force thyself To sinners. even with violence into the thoughts of those who do not wish to think on thee, namely, of sinners, who are not yet minded to repent and earnestly to amend their sinful lives. (Be not disturbed at my words, pious Christians!) Open thyself, O heaven! and give them one glimpse at thy eternal joys, which they shall never taste if they continue to live as they are living now. Open wide thy jaws, O hell! and show them the terrible flames and everlasting torments into which they are wantonly hurling themselves! Torment day and night without rest or intermission their imaginations and consciences with thy ghastly horrors! Come forward, ye unhappy lost souls, and call out unceasingly into their ears that miserable cry of despair that the Wise Man tells us of: "We fools;" ah, silly, accursed creatures that we are! "What hath pride profited us? or what advantage hath the boasting of riches brought us?" Despairing wretch

<sup>1</sup> Sicut dies mercenarii, dies ejus.—Job vii. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Cum sero autem factum esset, dixit dominus vineæ procuratori suo: voca operarios et rende illis mercedem.—Matt. xx. 8.

that I am! what better am I now for the honor and esteem I enjoyed among men on earth? What good is my money to me now? what profit the short-lived, miserable pleasures I enjoyed? Ah! these things are now past forever. "All those things are passed away like a shadow, and like a post that runneth on." In spite of them all I am lost forever. And behold they whom I formerly despised, whose piety I ridiculed as simplicity, they are now among the angels and the holy friends of God in the kingdom of heaven, while I must lie with the demons in the fire of hell! "Therefore we have erred." I must acknowledge to my eternal shame that I have been wrong, ah, shamefully wrong! But what avails this tardy confession of mine? It is all up with me! Once damned, damned forever. O heaven! joyful dwelling of the elect of God, thou mightest have been mine if I had but earnestly wished: I have lost thee forever! O God of infinite goodness! worthy of all love, I might have possessed Thee, and rejoiced with Thee for all eternity. What hast Thou not done to make me eternally happy? And now for all eternity I cannot have any part in Thee. Against my own better knowledge I must hate Thee forever as my worst enemy, and curse and blaspheme Thee! O men! O sinners! no matter how wicked you may be, whom I have left behind me on earth, and who still are in life, you may still, if you wish, gain heaven with all its joys; but there is no chance for me; I have already begun my unhappy eternity! I am lost forever! Parents, friends, brothers, and sisters, whom I loved formerly, your prayers and good works are of no good to me! For all eternity I may not look for any comfort, hope, time, or mercy. All that remains to me now is weeping, misery, and despair! Hell is my everlasting dwelling; this fire kindled by the divine anger is the element in which I must live; God is my implacable enemy; horrible demons are my companions; an eternity of intolerable torment my inheritance. Such are the cries of those wretches. Hardened sinner, is it then your wish one day to sing this doleful tune? Then if such is your determination, go at once and associate yourself to that unhappy rabble of the damned. There is no other alternative for you for all eternity.

**Conclusion**

But still rather should you make with me a far different res-

<sup>1</sup> Nos insensati. Quid nobis proffit superbia? aut divitiarum jactantia quid contulit nobis? Transierunt omnia illa tanquam umbra, et tanquam nuntius percurrens.—Wis. v. 4, 8, 9.

<sup>2</sup> Ergo erravimus.—Ibid. 6.



olution. Oh, no! merciful God! far from me the folly of ever wishing to join in the despairing chorus of the damned. To be always with the demons in hell is much too hard a lot for me to endure, although I must humbly confess that I have often deserved it by my many and grievous sins. I thank Thee for having borne with me so patiently and with such long-suffering in the past, and for having given me time to escape the danger of an unhappy eternity. Now I am determined not to defer repentance any longer; this very day I shall earnestly begin; I now heartily abominate and detest all my past offences; I regret above all that I have so shamefully despised and offended Thee, my God, worthy of all love! Receive me again into the arms of Thy infinite mercy! For the future I will serve Thee alone with all my heart and strength, nor will I cease to serve Thee until, as I hope, my happy eternity shall have begun, in which with Thy elect I shall love, magnify, and praise Thee forever. Amen.

END OF THE TENTH VOLUME.

*To the greater honor and glory of God, of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Queen of heaven, of all our holy guardian angels, and to the salvation of souls.*



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